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ATHELWOLD



ELFREDA. "LOOK YOU HERE"

ATHELWOLD

BY
AMÉLIE RIVES



NEW YORK
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Prance

92
P. 8

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND AND KINSWOMAN
LEILA GRAHAM PAGE
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS MOST
LOVINGLY DEDICATED



ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| ELFREDA. "LOOK YOU HERE" . . . | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| EDGAR AND ATHELWOLD . . . | <i>Faccs page 6</i> |
| ELFREDA AND HER NURSE. . . . | " 26 ✓ |
| "BY ALL THE SAINTS!" | " 34 ✓ |
| "REMEMBER" | " 82 ✓ |
| "DOST THOU SPEAK TO ME? WHAT HAVE I DONE?" | " 104 ✓ |
| ENTER ELFREDA, BLAZING WITH JEWELS | " 112 ✓ |
| DEATH OF ATHELWOLD. | " 116 ✓ |

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

EDGAR, King of England.
ATHELWOLD, Thane of Edgar.
OSWALD, a priest.
FROTHI, a dwarf and page to Athelwold.
OLGAR, Earl of Devonshire.
SIGEBERT, Athelwold's friend.
ELFREDA, Olgar's daughter.
BERTHA, a waiting-woman.
ELFLEDA, the King's favorite.
ELFREDA'S NURSE.

ACT I

SCENE 1.—A Hall in the Palace.

[Enter SIGEBERT and ATHELWOLD, followed by the dwarf FROTHI.]

Sig. I tell thee, Athelwold, he means thee
harm;

'Tis in the very trick o's eyelids.

Ath. Well?

To mean harm is but little. Were a wolf

To think alone of biting, who'd fare ill?

Sig. Thou speakest well o' wolves. Ay,
Athelwold,

Edgar hath not yet rid us of them all,

Though he hath chased the greater part to Wales;

He hath a wolf-cub to his pampering

Beneath this very roof.

Ath. Who? Oswald?

Sig. Ay,

Oswald himself, none other. Oswald—he—

That long-lipped, lean, up-looking, crook-eyed
beast;

That cringing, fawning, fulsome, flattering knave;
That slow-speeched, soft-voiced, wide-smiled
Oswald.

Ath. So

Thou dost not love this Oswald overwell?

Sig. Thou knowest that I hate him.

Ath. And for what?

Sig. Thou dost outpatience me! I hate him
for—

I hate him on account of— Oh, I hate him
Because that he is Oswald.

Ath. Sagely put.

Thou couldst not hate him were he not himself.
That were a fault somewhat beyond his mending.

Sig. Wilt thou be light? I say he means
thee hurt.

Ath. To mean is one thing, and to hurt an-
other.

Sig. Then thou wilt not be warned?

Ath. Sigebert, come here.

I love thee well, and that thou knowest, lad.

Thou dost love me, and that I also know.

Moreover, I know this—that oftentimes love

Imagines danger where all is secure.

Think you 'tis in the power of such an one

As thou hast said this Oswald to hurt me,

The King's friend, Athelwold?

Sig. It is for that

I think he means thee harm.

Ath. For what, boy?

Sig. Why,

For that thou art the King's friend, Athelwold.
All's sunshine now—flowers bend about thy way,
The wheels of thy triumphal car crush roses—
A pebble may clog all.

Ath. What say'st?

Sig. A word,

A look, a hint dropped when the King's in wine;
Thou may'st have vexed him with some haughty
freak,

Have jostled 'gainst his poise of self-esteem,
Have made too free, have laughed too long.

Ath. What then?

Sig. Then comes this Oswald with his honey
tongue,

Which overrolls the bitter of his words
As actual honey deadens nauseous drugs—
Comes he, I say, and into Edgar's ear,
Ready and dull with wine, doth drop some jest,
Only mayhap some hint, some slight allusion,
Some dainty telling of some doubtful tale;
And thou wilt then discover all too late
That Sigebert warned thee not without occasion.

Ath. Soft, soft, sweet boy! Be not offended.

Come,

I will be light no longer. Dost thou think this?

Sig. As I do live I think it!

Ath. Thou hast noted?

Hast watched him? hast deduced this from his actions?

Sig. I have his actions down as in a book.
He means thee harm.

Ath. The rogue's a vicious rogue,
Yet I have never vexed him that I know.

Sig. I think for that, mayhap, he hates thee more.

Ath. Well, well, I will be careful. So content thee,
I will be careful, sweetheart. Ah, the King!

Sig. The King—and Oswald.

[Enter EDGAR and OSWALD.]

Ed. Greeting, gentlemen.
(To ATHELWOLD.) Look you, my Thane, a word with you apart.
Good friends, I pray you take it not amiss
If I do ask your absence for a time.
By Paul, 'tis well!

[Exit SIGEBERT and OSWALD.]

Ath. What, Edgar?

Ed. Why, to walk,
Stretch our minds' muscles in an equal tug,
And scuffle for convictions. Feel the King
But in this golden hoop which thou shalt have
To rest thy foot on as we talk. So, bauble!
[Flings his crown from him.]
Look there, my Thane, spins it not merrily?

The crown feels not the dignity it makes.
So wanton are all emblems, that the cloak
Which folds a king will kiss a crooked nail
As quickly as a beggar's gabardine
Will do like office, and a monarch's crown
Spin like a discus fallen from the mark.
Let us sit here.

Atb. Thou'rt in a foreign mood.
Who set the fashion?

Ed. Why, go hang, Sir Thane!
Fashions are princes' lackeys. But a truce.
Know you Lord Olgar?

Ath. Earl of Devonshire?

Ed. The man. You know him?

Ath. If to know his deeds
Be to know him, why, then I know him.

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| <i>Ed.</i> | <i>Soft.</i> |
|------------|--------------|

What deeds translate the doer properly?
Nero once stooped to pat his mother's hound.
I say, know you this man in person?

Ath. Nay;

I have not even seen him.

Ed. There's much talk
About his daughter. Were the breath of praise
Given simultaneously, there were a wind
To blow her into heaven.

Ath. And as it is,

There hath sufficient been already, sire,
To waft her into Edgar's estimation?

Ed. Go hang! I am but mine own gossiper.
They say that she is beautiful.

Ath. My liege,
Were spoken beauty always actual,
There's not an ugly maid in England.

Ed. Well,
I know none.

Ath. That were like as tho' St. Peter
Should seek to prove the emptiness of hell
By saying that he knew none of its inmates.
Now, Edgar, as I live, 'tis my belief
That Satan will intrust thy bed o' coals
To some uncomely wench. There were no tort-
ure
Could subtler touch thee.

Ed. Nay, I'll swear that's false.
I am more racked when men do talk like maids;
Therefore I am more tortured o' the instant.
Give o'er this jest, my swordsman; I would hear
More o' this maid.

Ath. Then it is safe to say
This maid hears more of thee.

Ed. I say, give o'er.
Thou'st seen her?

Ath. Nay; nor tree nor blossom.

Ed. Come,
What is this foolery?

Ath. Why, 'tis to say,
I have not seen the sire or the daughter.



EDGAR AND ATHELWOLD

Ed. Three men to-day have told me of her beauty.

Ath. Three girls to-morrow will deny the statement.

Ed. I will the more believe it in that case.
I am afire with fancy, Athelwold;
In love with painted air. A patch of light
Upon the floor doth mind me of the hue
They say her locks are, and I can but think
Upon the tender roundness of her arms
When some such pretty arm doth woo mine eyes.
Words are but gems for her adorning. Yea,
I've set her very motion to a tune.
I hav't by heart—her look, her voice, her lips.
They say her eyes are blue. All heaven's above
To keep me from forgetting. Look you here.
This is no uncrowned babble; man and king
Both speak in this: I tell thee, Athelwold,
If she be fair as by report she shows,
I'll make her Queen of England—

Ath. What, my lord?—

Ed. I say I'll make her Queen of England.

Ath. Queen?

Art thou in earnest?

Ed. Ay, I'll make her Queen;
Espouse her, crown her, seat her on my throne.
But I must have a certain knowledge.

Ath. What!

All this on sober Friday?

Ed. Nay, I tell thee
I am not jesting.

Ath. Tell me that again.

Ed. I say I am not jesting. Dost thou hear?
I am not jesting. If this maiden, sir,
Be fair in truth as I do picture her,
I swear by God's crown I will give her mine.

Ath. To wear about her waist?

Ed. No, by my troth!
To give thee for a collar as her slave,
An thou dost irk me further.

Ath. Good my liege,
This fact holds monstrous mirth or little reason.
What hath so urged thee?

Ed. I am fancy-spurred;—
In love with mine imagination; meshed
In webs of mine own weaving; made a slave
By chains of mine own hammering. Give ear,
I would be certain.

Ath. Well, my liege?

Ed. I would
Be certain, Athelwold.

Ath. Why, send and learn.

Ed. Ay, that's my purpose, and thou art the
man.

Ath. I, Edgar?

Ed. Yea; who else?

Ath. Thou wouldst send me
A-wenching for thee?

Ed. What! That word to me?
I told thee once—

Atb. Then thou must tell me twice.
I say I will not do thy wenching for thee.

Ed. Even Athelwold may speak too freely.

Atb. And
Even Edgar may require too much of friendship.

Ed. Have I not said I wish her for my Queen?
Is not all honorable? What's amiss?

There's one condition only—shouldst thou find
That she is not so comely as men say,
Why, there's an end of it. Nor Queen nor leman
Shall smile on Edgar with a flabby lip.

Go to. What fire is in thee? O' my word,
Thou wouldst have been a colt to break! Go hang!
"A-wenching for me?" It was nobly said!

Now, by my crown, wert thou another—nay,
Didst thou so much as look unlike thyself,
Thou shouldst pay dearly for thy pride!

Atb. I pay
More dear for thine, I tell thee, Edgar.

Ed. Nay,
Try me no more. Kings do not pardon twice
On the same day. Vex me no further, sir.
Thou art commissioned unto Devonshire
To bring me word of Olgar's daughter.

[Exit angrily.]

Atb. So—
Royalty is a whip to scourge the time.

As man to man I like him ; as my King,
He hath no parcel in me. This is well ;
Ay, this is well indeed. I am commissioned
To match a blue eye by a bit of heaven ;
To find if certain tresses match the sun ;
If her throat be so white, her arms so smooth,
Her motion delicate. If all these charms
Make up a charming maiden. By the saints—
Nay, by great Woden, Thor the Hammerer,
Loki, and all the gods of stalwart days—
It is enough to set my sword adance
Within its scabbard. I his pander ? Nay,
Let him set Oswald tripping to this tune.
I know but ill to foot such love-measures.
Let him send Oswald—Oswald ?—Oswald ?—ah !
Why, there's a thought !

[Enter FROTHI, his dwarf. He comes up behind,
and speaks softly.]

Fro. And here's another, master,
To keep it warm.

Atb. How, Frothi ? Art thou there ?

Fro. Ay, master, and this thought o' mine doth
wait

Upon thy thought, e'en as I wait on thee.

Atb. Speak, boy.

Fro. What, master ? In a palace ? Why,
Know you not that to whisper of a king
In his own house is to hand Death a weapon ?

Ath. Well, dare him, then. I would this thought of thine.

Fro. Master, it doth concern a wolf. Nay, master,

Lower thine ear. It treateth of a wolf.

Edgar hath rid all England of these wolves.

Ath. Say'st thou that also?

Fro. Nay, give ear—stoop down.

I say the King hath rid us of these wolves—

All saving one, who fled not with the rest

To the Welsh hills. They call him Oswald, sir.

I'll sing to thee a song which hath for theme

His cunning and his treachery and his fangs.

Ath. Say you?

Fro. Ay, master, but not here—not here.

Ath. Why, then, without; come on, boy.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE 2.—ELFLEDA'S Apartment in the Palace. ELFLEDA and OSWALD.

Elf. You say it works? You speak a certainty?

You watched them personally? Marked his look?

Noted his manner? What said Athelwold?

Did he agree straightway, or was there room

For anger? Was the King—

Osw. Peace! peace! peace! peace!

I pray you, madam, softly. Here are questions!

I told thee that I walked apart with Sigebert;

How should I watch them? Sigebert, thou dost
know,
Holds Athelwold as dear as doth the King;
Wouldst have the watcher watched? Nay, but
it works;

It works. I'll stake my ears but it doth work.

Elf. An thou dost tell me false, I'll take thy
ears

To feed my deer-hound.

Osw. By my troth, then, madam,
Thy dog shall never die digesting me.
Success hath signs which the successful know.
I tell thee, it will work.

Elf. But how of Athelwold?
Hast reckoned of his coldness unto women?
His heart is iron.

Osw. Madam, thou must know
That iron heated is a fire itself.
What if from passion's glow the after-plunge
Into the icy waters of reflection
Doth temper it to steel? The work is done;
And, lady, not to give thee witting pain,
This maiden, this Elfreda, is so fair
That thy white self would pale beside her beauty
As when a moon doth melt on mid-day skies.
She seems made up of heavenly moods. Her
brow

Is fair as glimpses of the morning clouds.
Her eyes like spaces where the blue doth gleam

Between them, and the sunset's after-glow
Dies on her cheek. Thou dost no more com-
pare—

Sweet dame, forgive me, but thou dost no more
Compare with this Elfreda, this slim maid,
Than music silent doth to music sung.

Elfl. If thine the singing, I were fairer, knave.
Dost think to vex me by such mummery?
Go kindle Iceland. Go and blow the sea
Into a tempest. Go and light thy torch
At some near star.

Osw. Some falling star, mayhap.

Elfl. Have care, have care; if thou forget'st
thyself,

Forget not me and what I am, and what
Thou mayest be.

Osw. Why, no. Thou art Elfleda,
The quean of Edgar, not the Queen of Eng-
land.

Elfl. Dog!

Osw. Then beware my teeth.

Elfl. Now, as I live,
But that thou hast more knowledge of this vent-
ure,
I'd have those fangs of thine drawn out straight-
way

To make fool's music in a bladder. Look, sir,
If thou dost fail in this, I will not fail
In that I purpose for thy punishment. [Exit.]

Osw. Ay, 'twas well thought of; it was well conceived.

This Athelwold—this rust upon my brightness,
This pampered honey-gatherer of the King,
This lion of the dandelion locks,
The stealer of week-day kisses in a church,
This bracelet-keeper, this dull-sworded swordsman,

This well-beloved friend of Edgar. Why,
Who else should go on such an errand? Why,
Who else could better choose this King a Queen?
Here be a judge of noses! Here be one
To rightly test the sweetness of a mouth
By tasting; learn the smallness of a waist
By measurement of arm! Men long to love,
Love quickest when 'tis time; for all their lives
They do adore some shadow, which, reality
Resembling, doth outshine as mid-day sun
Outshines the sparkelries that close-pressed
thumbs

Make on the inner lids. I know his bent,
And, judging by the women he hath scorned,
Can sure select the woman he will love. [Exit.]

ACT II

SCENE I.—A Country Road.

[Enter ATHELWOLD and FROTHI, on horse-back.]

Atb. Is this the place ?

Fro. I see no crooked tree,
As they did tell us. Look, it should be here,
Just by that barberry-bush.

Atb. We've lost the way.
Plague on these rambling country roads, I say,
Though they led on to heaven! Boy, ride ahead.
Stay, here's my horse ; take him, and tie him
there—

There, to that sapling. I will rest me here
Upon this grass bank, whilst thou dost inquire
The nearest way unto Lord Olgar's castle.
Despatch, now, Quick-heels! Do not let me
dream

That thou art back, and wake to find thee absent.
[Exit FROTHI.]

Odds me! I am aweary. This lush spot.

[Talking drowsily, as if falling asleep.]
Wooes me to sleep. So. I will loll here at ease
Until my boy returns. Now, if I dream,
Let it not be of waking ; yet to sleep
Is but to be alive in spite of thee,

Defy thy reason, and do wondrous deeds,
Such as to cast thy sword among the stars
To loosen some for thine adorning,—ay,
As when a boy casts billets at a tree
To shake its apples earthward. Do I sleep,
I pray I dream of apples, nothing wiser.
Light dreams give heaviest sleep. But then,
good sooth!

I never sleep in daytime. It is well
To hear the summer humming of the fields,
Like love-songs stifled in the cloak of sleep.
Sleep, said I?—Sleep?—I—sleep—not—i' th'—
day— [He sleeps.]

[Enter ELFREDA and her Woman.]

Elf. So—Bertha?

Ber. Madam?

Elf. (bending over ATHELWOLD). Look you
here!

Ber. (cautiously). Sweet saints!
It is a man!

Elf. A man? Go to! Say rather
A god, who, venturing too near the sun,
Slipped with the further glory to the earth.
Look you what hair! It is more bright than
mine.

Ber. No, madam.

Elf. No? I tell you that it is.
Give eyes; I'll match it.

Ber. (fearfully). Pray you, madam—

Elf. What?

Ber. Why, do not wake him ; do not walk so close.

Elf. By Balder ! he doth look like Balder's self !
His locks are spread like sunlight on the grass.

Pah ! loose my sleeve, thou timorous flitter-
mouse !

Ah ! ah !—his eyes are blue ; stoop, girl ; peep
there ;

See how they gleam between his near-closed lids,
Like so much heaven-blue drowned in drops o'
rain.

I'll lay thee a new kirtle that his hair
Is brighter.

Ber. Nay, sweet lady ! Nay, come back.

Elf. Pshaw ! Wouldst thou sour me with this
thundering

Of fearful words ? Look, now ! Said I not so ?

[Stoops and matches *ATHELWOLD's* hair
with one of her own tresses.]

Thou'st lost the petticoat, but won my love

By being witness to my judgment. Soft !

Step softer—what a voice your gown hath, girl !

Here be an arm to crack the ribs of War,

Yet white out of all correspondence ! Come,

I think 'tis whiter than mine own. Let's see.

[Bares her arm, and compares it with *ATH-
ELWOLD's*.]

Ber. Madam!—good mistress!

Elf. It doth not seem fair
That all this looking should be on one side.
How if I tickle him with a grass-blade?

Ber. Nay,
Come!—come, for God's love! It may be some
demon
In fair disguise.

Elf. Disguise so fair, good wench,
Were far too tight a fit for wickedness.
Pluck me that oxlip there.

Ber. Oh, madam, tarry!
Be warned, be warned! He may awake in like-
ness
Of some foul thing—a wolf, a bear, a dragon.

Elf. Time then to fly. Give me the flower,
wench.

Ber. Oh, I will get me gone to cry for help!

[Exit BERTHA.]

Elf. (leaning over ATHELWOLD with the oxlip.)
Shall I first touch him on the lips or eyes?
His lips are nearest. Let me see (laughing). He
wakes.

No; sleep hath won him from me. Well, let be.
'Tis something, sooth! to find such beauty quiet,
That eyes may rest in looking. I will wait
Content unseen to see. There! then he stirred.
Nay; still as ever. Why, methinks, in truth,
Thou hast a very genius, sir, for sleeping,

While I've not even the small consolation
Of thinking that I figure in thy dreams,
Seeing thou dost not know me. What, again!
Thou dost grow restless. There! more sound
than ever!

I'll touch his eyes this time ; and now his lips ;
And now, again, his eyes ; and now (looking all
about her) his lips! [Kisses him.]

Atb. (starting up on his elbow). How, boy!
Where is't? The crooked tree. What's
there?

I have been dreaming. (Sees *ELFREDA*.) Soft,
though, I still dream.

What art thou?

Elf. (mysteriously). Thine imagination.

Atb. Then

Thou hast usurped my reason's office. Come!

Elf. What wouldst thou?

Atb. I would pinch thee.

Elf. Pinch me?

Atb. Ay.

Thou art so like substance that I'd think

Myself a shadow ere thyself a dream.

Elf. (holding out her hand). Why, here, then.

Kisses prove as much as pinches.

Atb. So, lady (kisses her hand).

Elf. Recollect, I am a dream.

Atb. Yea, that shall be mine office when I wake.
Meantime I'd prove thy other hand. [Kisses it.]

Elf. Nay, sir,
It was a jest. Thou art awake. Awake
In Devonshire.

Ath. That is to dream of love.

Elf. Such dreams prove often nightmares.

Ath. Wake me, then.

Elf. I know not how.

Ath. Show me some ugly mark—

Some mole, some flaw, some lacking in thy beauty.
By'r laykin, girl! thou hast some witchery,
Some charm. Dost walk with fern-seed in thy
shoe?

Nay, heed me not. Here, take thy flowers and
run;

I fear myself. How comes it woman eyes
Look from thy baby face? Furl thy white lids
If thou wouldst have men recollect thy youth;
Thine eyes do lash the blood like whips of flame,
And yet thy face is pure. It is some freak
Of circumstance; but hide thine eyes from men
If thou wouldst keep thine honor. Nay, fear
not;

I mean no hurt to thee, but all in kindness.
Thou shouldst less fear my harshness, pretty
maid,

Than most men's kindness. There! run, run,
I say!

Betwixt thee and my preaching there's no pulpit.
Yet stay; I have a thought.

Elf. Canst not divide it?

Ath. Nay; 'tis too meagre for division.

Elf. Well?

Ath. Or ill, I know not. Pretty lass, come here.

Elf. Thou hast just bidden me begone.

Ath. Ay, Ay.

Elf. Shall I obey thy first or after speaking?

Ath. (absently). Those eyes of thine are blue.

Elf. Is there aught writ

Against blue eyes?

Ath. Naught but what they may read.

Elf. Thine eyes are blue.

Ath. Look closer—they're not blue.

Elf. (looking). Heaven is not blue if they're not.

Ath. Well, thy way.

Have thine own way. (Aside.) Were I to take this maiden

Back unto Edgar, by my sword! he'd wed her,
If but to match her gold locks with a crown.

Elf. What dost thou speak? Some charm?

Why, then I'll run. [Pretending to go.]

Ath. Nay, not so quick. I've words for thee.

Elf. Why, then,

Keep them thyself. Such gifts I care not for.

Ath. Gifts? Dost thou care for baubles, lady-bird?

Elf. As birds for cherries.

Ath. (unbuckling a knot of precious stones from his hat feather). Here, then. Wilt thou have't?

Elf. What for?

Ath. A kiss.

Elf. Nay, keep it.

Ath. What! so coy?

Thy veil is bolder.

Elf. Nay; it flies away.

I'll follow.

Ath. Soft: run not. Keep thy red lips
Unto thy husband's kissing; I'll not rob him—
Thy future lord—of one. Yet such were thieves
More blessed in sin than virtue. Look you, girl,
I'll kiss you spite o' perjury. Soft—soft—
Talons, my dove?

[He holds her, and she feigns to struggle.]

Elf. I'll bite thee for thy kiss!

Ath. Why, thou'rt a pretty griffin, claws and
teeth!

Gently, my wild one—

Elf. Ha! thou durst not do it!

Ath. Thou durst not bite me.

Elf. Thou durst not kiss me!

Ath. Why, so, then—so, then—so, then—(kiss-
ing her. *ELFREDA* feigns to weep). Nay,
pale saints!

What have I done? Weep not! Weep not!

What devil

Am I possessed of? No more tears. Look up.
Art thou a village lass? Thy parents poor?
I'll give thee moneys—all thy kirtle full
Of broad gold pieces. Pretty bird, weep not!
Look you, if kisses scarred, you well might weep.
Why, if men's kisses left small spots o' green,
Young maids would walk as verdant as the
spring!

Give me thy name, and I will make it famous;
Ay, thou shalt have it writ above thy grave:
“Here lies a maid who cried because, instead
Of for a kiss—” Why, there, that's right!
Smile—smile!

Is thy home far? An 'tis, thou shalt mount up
And ride behind me. Come!

Elf. Nay, I must go,
And as I came. Here, sir, take back thy jewel;
I'll none of it.

Atb. Give me my kiss back, too. [Kisses her.]

Elf. Out on thee! [Runs out.]

Atb. How she moves! Her noble gait
Matches her birth as little as her eyes.

[Enter FROTHI.]

Heigho! here comes the lad. What news, boy?
Fro. Sir,

Good news; we be but short ways from the
castle.

Ere sundown we can reach it.

Alb. Well, come on.
Did see one running as thou rodest along?

Fro. Ay, sir. As fair a Jane-of-Apes, in truth,
As e'er I looked on—laughing as she ran.

Alb. Laughing?

Fro. Ay, sir, and that with all her might.
Her pretty bosom, working up and down,
Did, like a bellows, blow the flame o' mirth
Into her eyes. God's me! she laughed, sir!

Alb. Laughed?

Fro. What's there in laughing?

Alb. Naught but what we see.
(To himself.) Well, laughing! Well, the jade!

Fro. What say'st thou, sir?

Alb. That we must hasten supperwards. Come
on. [Exeunt.]

SCENE 2.—A Room in OLGAR's Castle, ELFREDA's NURSE sitting at her spinning.

Nur. Whence got she these ungodly ways? I
know not.

She hath been brought up at the knee o' Wisdom,
As 'twere upon her milk. With such a mother—
Lord! Lord!—I know not how it is—not I!

And yet she is so fair, the saucy hussy!
She'll turn me as I turn this wheel o' mine.
I can naught with her. Still she'll jaunt the road
In coarse attire, drest out in Bertha's kirtle.
Well, well, I know not how to mend it. Heaven

Doth know I scold and scold, and pray and pray!
To-day she hath set forth. I followed her;
Besought her with much trick o' tongue and love
That she would not set forth. Soft! Let me hear.
It is my lady.

[Enter BERTHA, breathless.]

How! thou margot pye?
What dost thou, and without my lady?

Ber.

Nay,

Word me not, goody. I have come for thee.
My lady will be tarrying i' th' lane,
A-tickling of a sleepy knight with flowers.

Nur. Dost want my spindle, hussy? What's
this clack?

Wilt word me, then? Knowest not to hold thy
tongue?

My lady tarrying tickling in a lane!

Hold! Here be she herself! Hark how she laughs!

Methinks she hath been tickling of herself,

Hey, ninny? Thou fat-witted tattler, thou!

[ELFREDA enters and flings herself upon a settle,
laughing and breathless.]

How now, my lamb? How now, my pretty one?
Thou'rt in fine feather.

Elf.

Am I so? Oh, nurse,

How thine old tongue will wag! What eyes
thou'lt make!

“He’ll fill my kirtle up with broad gold pieces.”
Nay, let me laugh! I’ll ne’er be quits with mirth.
Ho! Is’t thou, Bertha? Fair good-morrow,
Bertha.

Get to the kitchen, girl. Be off, I say!

[Exit BERTHA.]

Now, nurse, take breath. Thou hast an hour
before thee

Of most fierce jaw-work.

Nur. Wilt thou tease me, honey?

Lord! Lord! but thou be hot! A-running,
lamb?

Let me disrobe thee; let me fetch thy gown.
These rags do shame thy station and my office.

Elf. Let be, let be, until I tell my tale.

How thou wilt scold me! And he thought I
wept!

By all birds’ wings that ever flew, good nurse,
Freedom is sweet! Wild maidenhood is sweet!
Saints! he can kiss! He hath the kissing cut.
My blood ran up to meet his mouth. Speak,
nurse:

Was that a sin? `Ware how thou answerest,
though,

Lest I find sin more sweet than virtue. Ah,

Wast thou e’er kissed, nurse?

Nur. (simpering). Time and time again.

Elf. Is that the reason of thy lack o’ lips?
Methinks ’twill take a merry thought o’ time



ELFREDA AND HER NURSE

To kiss my lips away. Look you, sweet nurse ;
What of blue eyes ? Hast thou some legend ?

Eyes

That seem the condensation of all heaven.

What's said of blue-eyed men ?

Nur. A might o' things.

Elf. Well, word it, word it ! What is said of
them ?

Nur. That doth depend upon the one that
speaks.

Elf. Go to ! I'll pinch thee. Look thee,
nurse ; i' faith,

Soberly, dainty nurse, is there no song,
No elfin singing of these blue-eyed men ?

Nur. Ay, ay, belike.

Elf. Belike, sweet nurse ?

Nur. Belike

His daddy or his dam was blue-eyed too.

Elf. Out on thee ! Wilt thou be in my dis-
pleasure ?

Nay, nay, I meant it not ; but jest no more.

What o' blue eyes ?

Nur. (tapping her chin thoughtfully). Let's
see—let's see—let's see.

They'd make a red nose look the redder.

Elf. (pettishly). Oh,

I hate thee !

Nur. (almost in tears). Well-a-day !

Elf. (coaxingly). No ; now I love thee.

Be reasonable, though ; give me some comfort.
Hadst thou a sweetheart ?

Nur. Ay ; a was my husband.

Elf. But thou hadst others ?

Nur. Oh, Lord love you—yes!

Elf. What was the color of thy sweetheart's
eyes ?

Nur. Black, honey.

Elf. Black ?

Nur. Ay, black as roasted corn
When Bertha roasts it. A was known for's looks.

Elf. (in a wheedling tone). Mayhap they were
dark blue, and so looked black.

Nur. Black as two cinders fallen on a shift
On washing-days. A had a fine white brow,
White as thy linen when that I do wash it,
And leave it not for Bertha to smutch o'er.
Methinks there was not so much blue in them
As would have striped a moth's wing.

Elf. Well, but nurse,
Give me some story that thou know'st. Canst
say

If such be true or false ?

Nur. Oh, false, I'll warrant !

Elf. Why, nurse ? Come, glibly, nurse ! Why
wilt thou think it ?

Nur. Why, all that's theirs of heaven is in their
eyes.

Thou'lt find it so. And look ye, lady-bird—

Elf. (absently and smiling). 'Twas so he called me.

Nur. (furiously). Out upon him! Lout! Impudent lout! Could I but finger him!

Elf. Now thou art silly.

Nur. Nay, I am not, honey. Give ear, my cade lamb; thou must not so freely—

'Tis sin to kiss for kissing.

Elf. What for, then?

Nur. For love, heart. Dost thou heed?

Elf. I listen, goody, But come not at thy meaning.

Nur. Thou must love The man, and not the lips that kiss thee only.

Elf. (absently and half to herself). I know not.

It was sweet. I've thought on it
Until it pierced me like a little flame
From head to foot. Who comes?

[Enter OLGAR.]

Olg. (fondly). Thy father, wench. Look you, my mouse, who think you is below, And hungry?

Elf. My lord Ethelbert? Not he? Lewellyn, then? Why, then—

Olg. There—stay thy guessing. This is beyond thee. 'Tis none other, girl, Than Athelwold, the King's Thane—Athelwold,

1
The friend of Edgar, owner of much gold,
Lord of the noblest fields in England, child.
Come! slough these dingy rags, my bright-eyed
snake;

Trick thee in all thy best to welcome him.
See you unto it, nurse. No dallying. Come,
Trip it, my lass. This may mean all or nothing.
[Exeunt omnes.]

SCENE 3.—A Hall in OLGAR'S Castle,

[Enter ATHELWOLD alone.]

Atb. This venture doth hang heavily upon me.
Edgar hath halved my love for him by this,
And hath retained the worm-eaten portion.
Yea,

I've shut mine eyes upon his tyranny,
So long as me it touched not; now, indeed,
Its sharp and grasping fangs sink in my flesh.
I'm vexed for being vexed. Knew he not oth-
ers

To do this thing for him? Friendship hath laws
More stern than kingdoms. I confess in full
That I chafe at it. If the maid prove worthy,
I'll yield this King my fealty and his Queen
At the same time, make monk-pens of my castles,
And swing a foreign sword in mine own cause.
Yet he hath loved me. But he should not try
me
Unto this measure.

[Enter OLGAR.]

Olg. Sir, I crave thy patience.
Thou shalt be served forthwith, in such short
time

As't takes a wench to put her gewgaws on.
My daughter will attend us. But what news?
What news o' men and men's work? Is all
smooth?

And Oswald? Goes he sleekly as of yore?
They say he hath high favor at the court
And with the priesthood. Well, I'll tell thee,
sir,

A priest ne'er set the fashion o' my liking.
Why, look you, now, the man hath no more
brawn!

Look you—mine arm. I am well gone in years,
Yet could I twirl this Oswald as a branch,
A last year's leaf! There's not enough of man
In him to cast a shadow. Well, well, well!
Kings have strange whims. Kings' dreams have
meanings. Well,

I know not. But this Oswald. It doth maze
me—

I'll say as much to thee—but these strong men
Do often hanker after weak ones. Ay,
It is as though they liked the manners, sir,
Of things that claim protection. How go
wenches?

Who's uppermost? No Queen as yet, of course?
'Twere well there were a Queen. Thou know'st
the law

Of marriage. It were well he took a wife,
Say you? That's well. Sir, I do bid you wel-
come.

My failing eyes have joy in you. Old age,
Self-honoring, doth ever honor youth.
Is it that hussy kitchen-wench Elfleda
Who yet holds sway o'er Edgar? That El-
fleda?

Not, truly! What! so? Well, well, who would
think it?

Doth she not squint? Well! one shall hear such
tales.

'Tis all men's business if a king's jade squints.
Thou'lt tarry with us for a month or so?
Nay, now—no nays but mine. If thou couldst
know

The joy it gives me to hold speech with thee!
It makes mine own youth smell like spring re-
turned.

I tell thee, memory hath a ticklish way
Of riding on a perfume. There's some scent
Of horse and leather—nay, of grass and steel—
Nay, but of—well, God wot! of something,
boy,

That makes my youth a presence i' the room.
Come, yield thy promise.

[Enter ELFREDA.]

Ha, my lass, come hither.
Give me thy supper-worth o' sweet persuasions.
This is my daughter, sir; and this, my pretty,
Is that Lord Athelwold of whom thy nurse
Hath no doubt put out fires with telling thee.

Atb. (aside). Heaven fall on me if this be not
in truth

My Lady o' th' Lane!

Elf. (aside). By all the saints!
Sir Sleepy Eyes! Now would to all above
My lips had touched a red-hot searing-iron
Ere they had wed with his!

Olg. Come, word it, lass!
La! la! Both stricken dumb? What's with
thee, girl?

Up with thy chin. 'Tis coyness overdone;
None can digest it. Why, my madam glib-
tongue,

What's come to thee?

Elf. I have a dizziness.

Olg. Sell't for a kiss (kissing her). So, lass—
go lightly. Up,
Up with thy head. A welcome for his lord-
ship.

Elf. Your lordship—you are—I am—that is,
we—

Are very welcome.

Olg. (aside to *ELFREDA*). Out! Thou art bewitched!

There is some pixy lodging in thy wimple.
Thou givest tongue no better than a house-dog.
Why, out! Where are thy wits?

(Aloud.) Fair sir, the lass
Hath something that she calls a dizziness.
'Tis a new gift o' wilfulness. Well, well;
She'll tire of it anon. I'll leave ye, sir,
That ye may find your tongues while I am absent.

Give ye good speed.

Elf. Nay, father!

Olg. Stay, my lord!
Why, what the saints, girl! Pluck me not so,
lass!

This coat's an old coat, and doth need respect
I' th' handling. I do say that while ye chatter
I'll look unto the venison.

Ath. Good, my lord!
Thou makest way but for regret, since, truth,
We value thee above thy venison.

Elf. Ay,
Ay, father; go not. Let me go; thou know'st
I have a knack with venison.

Olg. Why, what's this?
(Aside.) Thou arrant baggage! Thou wee-brained ough!

Know you not 'tis a chance ye lose? Moreover,



"BY ALL THE SAINTS!"

Each chance o'erlooked is snapt up by the devil
To weight the balances against us!

(Aloud.) Sir,
Methinks I smell a smell o' burning meat.
You know not how a hunter loves his game.
I am more patient with my spitted venison
Than e'er was Beelzebub with a roast o' priest-
flesh.

Nay, sir—'tis burning. Naught can hold me!
Ha! [Rushes out.]

Atb. (impetuously). Madam, upon my knees I
crave your pardon.

Say but the word, and I am gone o' th' instant,
Without excuse or farewell.

Elf. Nay—my father—
Thou owest him a deference.

Atb. Did he know,
His henchman would compel me from his gates.

Elf. (archly). Would'st have me, sir, usurp his
henchman's office?

Atb. Lady, I swear to thee that mine offence
Was ignorant; and yet, could I undo it,
Sooner I'd leave thee now than have that kiss
Melt from my memory's lips.

Elf. Sir, you forget.

Atb. Nay; I remember. If thou dost for-
give,

Let me but touch thy hand in token of it.

Elf. They say we should forgive.

Ath. 'Thou art a saint!

Elf. No, by my womanhood!

Ath. Then thou art more.

For, by my manhood, thou'rt the very crown
And top of womanhood! (*Aside.*) What do I
say?

Ha! Loyalty, thou hast outgrown thy dress.
Let me remember how I stand in this.

(*In a cold voice.*) Madam, I am beholden to thee
in all.

Command me.

Elf. (*aside.*) Here's a sudden frost! But now
He was afire where all is present ice.

(*Aloud.*) I thank thee, gentleman. Here is my
father.

[*Enter OLGAR.*]

Olg. So! Have ye found your tongues? So!

Athelwold,

Hath she unbended? 'Tis a pretty sight
To watch a maid unbend from coyness. Ay,
'Tis like a young branch springing up again
From its plucked weight of fruit. Well, well.

I see,

I see how 'tis. Come, lead her, Athelwold.

Thy hand, lass. Come, my venison would al-
lure

A ghost to gluttony. Come on, come on.

[*Exeunt.*]

[Enter FROTHI.]

Fro. I like not this—I like not that maid's eyes.

And it was she who ran and laughed to-day.

Oh, ay! Though she were thicker sewn with gems

Than a white beach with pebbles, I would know her.

She is too beautiful; and there's a devil

But half drowned in her eyes. I like it not.

She hath a way with her it hath ta'en my lord;

She 'th come upon his judgment from the rear,

And killed his reason with her poniard eyes.

Ay, ay, I've word of her. I know all England

Gapes at her beauty. Well, if she were true—

But truth to one is falseness to another.

What of the King? I would I knew her bent.

Here comes her woman; I will talk with her.

[Enter BERTHA.]

Ber. La, sir, is't thou?

Fro. Sweet murderess, none other.

Ber. How? Murderess! Be these court manners? Murderess?

Fro. Why, hast thou not killed Melancholy by thine approach? By my troth, the rogue hath a fairer death than he deserves.

Ber. La, sir! I've heard tell of how you court

gallants will talk and talk, and ne'er a meaning at the bottom o' a hundred words.

Fro. And have they also told thee how we may mean and mean, and ne'er a word atop o' all this meaning? Ha?

Ber. La, sir! What wilt thou be staring at?

Fro. Thou hast a look o' thy mistress. O' my word, a copy in brown o' a monstrous fair painting.

Ber. (simpering). They do say I have her walk.

Fro. And her eyes to an eyelash.

Ber. (simpering more than ever). I have thought it.

Fro. Do we agree thus early? Sweet omen! But, being so alike in outward seeming, methinks thy souls should resemble also. Are thy invisible selves well matched?

Ber. Not to be vain, sir, I do think, sir, as how my temper be the smoother, sir. My lady will have her tirrets.

Fro. Ay, thine eyes are milder, now that I look again. Hath thy lady many lovers?

Ber. Ay, sir, to the number that the forest hath birds; but they will all be a-singing o' th' same tune.

Fro. And the lady?

Ber. Why, she hath had mighty love for some fourscore and ten, but hath repented her at the church door.

Fro. And the gallants?

Ber. Do still be for sighing and wooing.

Fro. Hang me, if I would not be all for cursing and swearing! As soon would I tarry a maid's second scorning as stay for a wolf to bite me twice.

Ber. Ay, sir, but my lady hath a strange something i' th' very curl o' her eyelashes. Some say it doth not proceed from heaven; but I know not. She hath had more wooing and less winning than any lady in all England. Oft will she say to me, "Look ye, Bertha; marriage is not for me, nor I for marriage, lest it do mightily better mine estate." And methinks a marriage so to do would needs be with the King himself.

Fro. To wed a king is to better lowliness at the cost o' peace. Well, well. Thou hast a plump arm. I suspect thee o' one other resemblance to thy mistress.

Ber. How, sir?

Fro. Why, i' th' matter o' wooers. Ha! wilt thou be hanging thy head?

Ber. La, sir! I will have great needs o' hearsay to keep me discreet. But thy supper, sir, I' fecks, I was sent to bid thee to supper. How hast thou twisted me!

Fro. An thou'll twist me thy lips for a kiss, I'll ask no more. Come on! Come on! I do hunger equally for kisses and for venison. [Exeunt.]

ACT III

SCENE I.—A Hall in OLGAR'S Castle.

[Enter FROTHI.]

Fro. All goes as I did fear. He hath the fever;
She in her golden web of tresses sits
Like some bright spider, and the mesh hath
snared

Him and his honor. It is now two moons
Since he did ride from Edgar on this quest;
The King must wax impatient. Oswald's there
To urge him with Suspicion's venom'd spurs.
Ah, my dear lord, there is some spell upon thee.
Would I could break it! Lo, they come to-
gether!

Always together now! Morn, noon, and night.
May God take this into his moulding grasp!

[Exit.]

[Enter ELFREDA and ATHELWOLD.]

Elf. (casting herself down). Sing to me, Athelwold.

Ath. Nay, give me grace,
I'm not in singing temper. All's awry.
I'd make thee but harsh, jangling music, lady.

Elf. Why, talk, then.

Ath. On what subject?

Elf. Of thyself;
That doth less tire me than all other topics.
Of thy fair self, thy battles and thy voyages;
Thy exploits, ventures, both by land and sea;
Of all thy past, thy hatreds and thy loves.

Atb. My greatest hatred hath been hating
Love.

(Aside.) How hath he ta'en revenge upon me!

Elf. What?
Didst thou say something to thy shoulder?
Love?

Why hast thou hated Love? Methinks Heaven
formed thee
To be Love's champion.

Atb. Not I—not I.

Elf. I say it. Dost thou hear? And I will
say it,
Though thou dost turn from love to hating me.

Atb. It were as one.

Elf. Why, what a ravelled mood!
Thy humors' threads are frayed beyond all pa-
tience.

Look, sir—this apple—wilt thou share it with
me?

Atb. Nay, nay. Have done with such cool
wantonings.

Eat not; it vexes me.

Elf. Why, what will please thee?

Atb. Thy lips!

Elf. My lord?
Ath. I say thy lips will please me.
 Wilt yield them?
Elf. Athelwold!
Ath. Ay, feign, feign, feign.
 Thou couldst feign purity on moonlight nights.
Elf. Wilt thou insult me?
Ath. Ah! have done with feigning.
 Give me thy lips—I will not feign to kiss them.
Elf. How dost thou mean—I feign?
Ath. Why, that thou lovest me!
 Think'st thou I know not how thou laughest,
 madam,
 When I am turned? Thou hast the knack o'
 laughing—
 And with thy maid-servant.
Elf. I laugh at thee?
 With Bertha? Athelwold!
Ath. Well, didst thou not!
 Come, no more feigning.
Elf. (passionately). If I love thee not,
 Let thy sword kiss my heart as it were wanton.
 Come, sir!—thy steel! My heart's a baggage—
 come!
 No kiss should shame it! Come!—thy sword—
 thy sword!
 Oh, I had never thought to tell thee of it!
 Nay, let me go.
Ath. I will not let thee go.

Ay! this is fate. Why move a finger? Soft,
Softly, my falcon! Oh, my pretty one!
Thou knowest not what thou dost. There, go—
go—go!

Elf. Why wilt thou hide thy face? Why
must I go?

Dost thou believe me? Hath not my remaining
To bear thy scorn proved that I love thee?
Look!

I love thee.

Atb. Nay, I must not look. Away!
Lay not thy hand on me. Wilt thou be gone?
Nay, nay; I meant it not. Let me look once,
But once, and then—Thine eyes! thine eyes!
thine eyes!

Ah, they are full of poison to the brim!
Drink, Honor—drink and die! How thou dost
look!

Elf. (breathing hurriedly). And thou!—how
thou dost eat mine eyes with thine!

Atb. Is thy soul in them?

Elf. Ay; and my heart, too.

Atb. Then let me eat them also. There's no
way

But that to happiness.

Elf. But what?

Atb. To yield

Both heart and soul as bribe unto grim Fate.

There is no morsel that she dearer loves

Than a big heart served up with honor cold.
Look up. No faltering. God's eyes for thine!
They could make heaven of hell without a God.
Say that thou lovest me.

Elf. I love thee.

Ath. Ah!

Again.

Elf. I love thee.

Ath. Now again—with eyes,
With lips, with arms, with body. Come, once
more!

We'll say't together—so—

(Both.) I love thee!

God!

Thou'rt mine. I swear it by His vain-taken
name.

Mine and none other's. Mine for life, for death.
Look you—did I die first, to find you false,
My burning ghost would knaw unto your mar-
row.

Elf. Ah, thou dost hurt me!

Ath. Didst thou heed me? Come,
Kiss me again. When shall we wed?

Elf. To-morrow?

Ath. To-night.

Elf. To-night, then. At what
dost thou look?

Ath. (gazing beyond her, but still embracing
her). Even at departing Loyalty.

Elf. (following the direction of his eyes).

Who's there

That hath so strange a name? I cannot see him.

Is it some beggar?

Atb. Ay; he begs for grace.

Elf. Thou'rt mocking.

Atb. Shall I let Dame Fate outmock me?

Elf. Look not so far away. Dive in mine eyes.

Atb. What's at the bottom? Gold?

Elf. If love be gold.

Atb. Nay; dross—when love doth die it turns to dross,

As men to rottenness.

Elf. What words are these?

Come, I will close thy lips (striving to coax him).

Atb. (still holding her off). Close Conscience' lips.

I care not how I prate, so he be silent.

Elf. Thou hast strange fancies.

Atb. (coldly). Canst thou come at them?

Elf. Nay, sir. Nor at thy love. I see it all.

Thou hast beguiled an hour with mockery.

I will be gone, sir, as thou didst desire.

Atb. Elfreda!

Elf. Oh, what pain is in thy voice!

Hast thou some wound I know not of?

Atb. Ay, child.

Elf. Oh, let me dress it. Let me comfort thee.
Death's in thy face.

Atb. No, sweetheart; in my heart.
Well, well—have done. Weep not. Come
closer—come.

Kiss me. Thine arms. Pain is the only coin
Joy doth acknowledge. Never ask to know
More than thou knowest, save to-morrow, dear,
When love hath grown like flowers i' th' night.
Come, let me feel thee. [Exeunt.]

[Enter OSWALD.]

Osw. It works! It works! My brew doth
work in truth.

We'll have a goodly quaffing by the horns
Of the new moon! 'Twere worth a longer jour-
ney

To hear a shorter tale—that 'twere. God's me!

Had I as many bones as hath a graveyard,

I'd count it but as justness did all ache

Together, an I rode to such a knowledge!

Ah! here he comes again—alone. Fair dreams,

Fair lord, I have thee in my prayers. Soft—
soft!

I must move softly. I will back o' th' instant

Unto my jealous mock-queen with this news.

[Exit.]

[Enter ATHELWOLD.]

Atb. Is this to be alive? Is this to love?
Would I were dead with hating life and love!
How came this on me?—on me—Athelwold—
Who have but used love's name to tickle mirth
Or lay a wager? O thou monstrous glutton,
That feed'st on honor, pride, truth, fealty, all
Of God in man! Shall men still call thee love,
Mocking that god whose name thou hast usurped?
What is to love? Is't to outlive all peace,
And know thyself a coward to the core?
Oh, then, Hate's gentle; Hate is honest; Hate
Hath been untimely born and missed his name.
Hate should be Love—Love, Hate; yet they are
twins;

For, loving one thing, we do hate another,
Perhaps a better. Who would live to face
Forsaken duty, look upon dead pride,
And share Fame's mantle with Dishonor? Nay,
Let me fight naked at the gates of hell
With full-armed Sin, ere I do fall so low!
I will be gone—I will be quit of this.
Frothi, my horse! Frothi, I say, my horse!
And yet—her eyes! Here's manhood! here is
valor!

Here is a king's friend worthy of a king!
And yet her eyes—her eyes—her eyes—her
eyes—

They are two flames—they've burned all good in
me.

Even them I do but love with a charred soul,
The cinder of a soul—a star gone out.
Had he not been a tyrant— Well, 'tis sure
He hath but his deserts in all of this—
In all of this he hath but his deserts.
And yet so kind a friend, so just a king!
Ay, conscience, speak! Arise from the dead past;
Howl in mine ears ere I be deaf with wishing.
Oh, Edgar, Edgar!

[Enter ELFREDA.]

Elf. My lord, thy wound again? Pray thee
be wise.
Why didst thou leave me? Come, here is my
kerchief;
Wilt thou not be advised?

Atb. Ay, by my soul;
But wisdom is above me.

Elf. How?

Atb. In heaven.
Look thou: how much may women lack in honor
Ere they confess themselves dishonorable?

Elf. I know not.

Atb. Verily I know not either.

Elf. Is this a jest?

Atb. I'd swear to it in the dark.
Give me thine eyes. I think thou lovest me.

Elf. Thou knowest it.

Atb. How many other men
Have shared these honors with me? Art thou
honest?

Elf. My lord, thou knowest that I am.

Atb. Ay, ay—
Look to it, then—see that I'm not deceived.
I am a man gone deep in recklessness,
And thee the rising flood may also drown.
Swear to thy truth.

Elf. I am afraid.

Atb. Of me,
Or of the truth? Come, swear.

Elf. What—that I love thee?

Atb. Ay, swear it.

Elf. I do swear by all the saints
I love thee—love thee. Oh, for sweet love's sake,
Look not so harshly on me. Have I vexed thee?

Atb. Not so. Weep not—I love thee; but be
true—

Be true. I will forgive thee anything
So thou be true. Weep not. Dost thou not
know

Men's minds to men are riddles? How shalt thou,
A tender maiden, think to read my soul?

It were but grewsome reading, trust me, sweet.

Still do we hanker for what's past our ken,

Walking with open eyes against the dark.

How wouldst thou like to be a queen?

Elf. A queen?

Atb. Ay, sweetheart. How if I were King of England?

How then? Wouldst love me more?

Elf. Nay; but a queen—

I would in truth that thou couldst be a king!

Atb. Ha! dost thou? Wherefore?

Elf. Why, I would be queen.

That is, I think so. Wouldst not make me queen?

Think o' me in a crown! Why, I could stare

An emperor to slavery!

Atb. Softly.

Elf. Why,

I'd be a queen o' queens. Nothing should daunt me.

I' faith, I'd be familiar with my sceptre

As nurse with walking-staff, and wear my crown

As 'twere a sunbeam fallen on my head,

So lightly would I wear it. Would, in truth,

Thou wert a king!

Atb. I see that, spite o' words,

Thoudst love me more.

Elf. Nay; but to be a queen!

Why didst thou think it?

Atb. Probably, my sweet,

Because thou look'st like one.

Elf. Thou art the prince

O' flatterers, if not the King of England!

Do I look so, in truth?

Ath. Thou dost indeed.
Where is thy father?
Elf. Wouldst thou speak with him?
I'll call him.

Ath. Do so, sweeting—stay for this
(kisses her). [Exit ELFREDA.]
What devil set me to't? What fiend of speech
Possessed me that I named the King to her?
Accursed Fate, how dost thou scoff at me!
Yet, I was sometime honored of myself
Ere that the god-spark was with self extin-
guished,
Quenched by the rising flood of passions furi-
ous,
O'er which its guiding light made clear the way.
Now all is dark. I know not on what rock
This life of mine will split.

[Enter OLGAR.]

Ah, dear my lord,
Can I have word with thee?
Olg. Ay, that thou canst.
What is it? No evil news from court?

Ath. My lord,
I love thy daughter, and would wed with her.

Olg. Well come at! Roundly spoken! Thou
dost know how to approach a difficulty's quills;
how to settle this porcupine conjecture. Stanch-
ly said. Thou hast gone up in my estimation;

like à high tide on the face of a rock, thou hast left thy mark. Am I first in this matter?

Atb. The Lady Elfreda knows that beyond limits I do love her.

Olg. Well, then—well, then—well, then.

Atb. I would have thy permission to wed with her.

Olg. As thou hast said. Well?

Atb. And shortly.

Olg. That, too. Well?

Atb. Naught remains but that I kneel to thank thee and receive thy blessing.

Olg. I know thou wilt make a good husband.

Atb. In what respect, my lord?

Olg. Why, thou art brave enough to keep thy wife gentle, and gentle enough to teach her to be brave. Thou art not selfish, as I have noticed by thy sittings i' th' sun (when ye twain have shared the seat beneath the pear-tree), that she might have greater shadow. That thou dost fear God is written on thy brow; and that thou dost love the lass is written in thine eyes. Moreover, by the cleanness o' the latter I do know that thou hast ne'er been given to much wine-bibbing or lolling wi' women. Therefore I do tell thee again that my daughter is thine when thou shalt claim her, and that my good-will was thine ere thou didst ask for it. Go to! go to!

No words. Thou may'st treat me to a deed or two by-and-by. [Exit OLGAR.]

Atb. His blessing on my falseness. Well, let be.

It is a creed more easy than 'tis easing.

Oh, how a treachery to any one

Doth fill the heart, crowding all pleasures out !

And I must face him ; I must meet his eyes ;

Nay, I must lie to him. O yesterday,

I'd purchase thee with all my life's to-morrows !

[Exit.]

SCENE 2.—A Room. ELFREDA and her NURSE.

Elf. But I do love him, nurse. Thou dost not know

How I do love him !

Nur. Tell me of it, then.

Elf. How can I tell thee ? Thou hast loved ; tell me,

How didst thou love ? Didst thou send sleep away

That thou might'st recollect his kisses, nurse,

When it was dark ? Didst thou e'er kiss thy arm

That he had kissed it ? Didst thou love his doublet—

The very manner of his shoulder-cloak—

His sword—his dagger—ay, his shoes—his hat ?

Didst thou so love thy love? Come, tell me,
nurse.

Nur. I think 'twas different. I did wash his
clothes,
Where thou hadst loved them.

Elf. Oh, thy dusty mind!
Years crumbling over thee have smirched thy
fancy

To one pale blur. Canst thou not talk of love
As I would hear thee? Come! how did he kiss
thee?

Loudly, I'll warrant.

Nur. Ay, a smacked me well;
A was no kiss-slicer; a gave 'em whole.

Elf. Go to! A kiss should sound no more,
good nurse,

Than when two clouds do melt into each other,
So melt dear loving lips in kissing, nurse.
There's more of art than instinct in this kissing.
Be sure o' that.

Nur. La! where dost get such wisdom?

Elf. Out of the darkness when my mind is light.
Thou ne'er shalt see so plain the unseen world
As when the actual world is sunless, nurse.
Nurse, wilt thou weep when I am wedded?

Nur. Nay—
To bring my lamb ill luck? Not I!

Elf. Why, then,
What wilt thou? Wilt thou laugh?

Nur. Nor laugh, my lamb.
That were unseemly as to weep. Content thee,
I'll bear me decently.

Elf. Nurse, what wouldst say
Were he a king?

Nur. La! how thou babblest, honey!

Elf. But think—I'd be a queen! Now as I speak
I feel my crown's sharp gold upon my head.
To be a queen!—the Queen of England—ha!
To have Death for my henchman. Listen,
nurse,

Did any so much as offend e'en thee,
I'd straightway proffer thee his stupid head
For ball to wind thy yarn on!

Nur. Bloody talk!
Cease, honey, cease; I like not such wild talk.

Elf. Ay, but to be a queen!

Nur. Why, go to, heart!
Thou'rt different. What's thy mood?

Elf. Why, all for power.
O that I were the hewer of my fate!
Then should be constellations born for me—
Well, well, but I do love him.

Nur. There, that's well;
Let kings and queens alone, and talk of love.

Elf. Yet one might love a king. Hark! I am
called. [Rushes out.]

Nur. Ah, well-a-day! I dread these clashing
moods.

SCENE 3.—ATHELWOLD leaning at a table ;
FROTHI at his side.

Ath. Sing, boy! give out that voice of thine,
which is as strange a thing in thy short body as
would be a great thought in a little mind. A
light song, neither of war nor of love. Canst
thou sing such ?

Fro. Ay, master ; there be a song o' a gnat,
Which is in great favor with the cockchafers.
So :

“Ho ! gnat on a thistle-puff, whither away ?

Where to, little fay ?

I am off to the East, where the God of the
Day

Still slumbers, they say.

But what will you do for to eat and to drink

Over there, Imp o' Ink ?

Why, Balder's red blood, I will drink it like
wine,

Mistress mine,

And the syllabub clouds that the elfins do
spatter

On heaven's blue platter,

I will breakfast on them. But anon I must fly,

So good-luck, so good-bye,

To thee and to thine,

Mistress mine !”

Ath. Well sung, gnat on a thistle-puff; I say well sung, Imp o' Ink. When wrotest that ode to thyself, Sir Gleeman?

Fro. Master, it hath been told how that an elf o' light wrote that with his finger in the dust on a grass-blade.

Ath. Away with thee! Here comes the Lady—

Fro. How, master? The lady i' th' song?

Ath. No, poppet; the Lady Elfreda. And 'ware lest thy skin suffer for thy soul's good.

Off with thee. [Exit FROTHI.]

[Enter ELFREDA.]

Sweet one, thou art most welcome.

Elf. Ay, my lord?

Ath. Ay, for I would a long half-hour with thee

Of farewell kisses.

Elf. How! Farewell?

Ath. Ev'n so.

I must without delay entreat the King

To give permission for our marriage.

Elf. Nay,

Go not to-day—to-morrow. Wilt thou go?

Ath. I must, my sweet. And wilt thou miss me, then?

Elf. I'll take some drug, and sleep till thou art back.

Why must thou go?

Atb. It is a courtesy
I owe my King. Tempt me no more, fair blossom.

One kiss; one more. Oh, all that's sweet in
spring

Lives in thy breath! I would thou wert my wife,
To go with me.

Elf. Oh, would I were, beloved!
Leave me thy glove, one which thy hand hath
shaped;

I'll think thy hand is in it when 'tis dark.

Would thou hadst gone and come! How many
days

Divide us from our day of days?

Atb. But two.

I'll founder twenty horses, dear, my love,

Ere I will disappoint thee.

Elf. Oh, make haste;
And let me have a lock of thy sweet hair
To weave into my wedding gown. Is't yes?

Atb. Why, thou shalt clip me bare as any monk,
If 't please thee. And thou dost love me?

Elf. Ay,
Out of all order. I am mad o' love,

My warrior, my lord, my husband—king.

Atb. (violently, almost fiercely). Not that!

Elf. How thou didst startle me!

Not what?

Thou wert so rough.

Ath. Not that, not that, I say.
Dost hear? Not that.

Elf. Tell me of what thou speakest.

Ath. Why, of that word thou call'st me.

Elf. Warrior?

Ath. No, no; thou knowest. Trifle not. Thou knowest

That last name thou didst call me. So, so, so.

Kiss me, forgive me, heed me not. Once more

Thine arms about my neck; once more; once more.

Give me thy troth again. Swear thou'lt be true.

Elf. I swear it.

Ath. It is written. Recollect

It is recorded. Now for all—farewell. [Exit.]

Elf. Why should he tremble when I call him king?

There's something here beyond me. Let me see.

I'll put it by; I will not think on it.

I'm glad his kisses stir me. Why, i' faith,

Should that one word so harry him? Well, well!

He hath the sweetest eyes! So deep a blue

Should almost dye his tears. The sweetest lips!

He would be perfect if he were—a king.

ACT IV

SCENE I. — A Room in the Palace. EDGAR
seated moodily. ELFLEDA at his feet.

Elf. Sire, shall I sing to thee?

Ed. (mutteringly to himself). There hath been
time

To woo ten maidens since he left me. Nay,
Nay, not a note. Thou'rt worse to chirp than
birds

At mating-time. (To himself.) He hath been
wounded, sure—

Some dire mischance hath fallen, or perhaps
He thinks to pay me for my humor. Well,
We'll see.

Elf. I have a song of battle, sire,
Wherein words roar along the winding lines
As horsemen pelt along a smoking road.
I've never sung it.

Ed. Ay, then, never do!
Wilt let me be? (To himself.) One day o'
grace, and then—

Then—an he comes not—when he comes—

Elf. (coaxingly). Go to!
I know thou'dst have me sing.

Ed. I'll have thee prisoned
An thou dost further irk me. Go! thy jewels!

Go bind thy hair! Go tang thy bracelets! Go!
Do anything save speak to me again!
(To himself.) 'Tis in my mind that he will come
to-day;

I dreamt of him last night.

[Angrily to ELFLEDA, who fingers his robe.]

What! dost thou pluck me?

Away!

Elf. There is a sound of horses' hoofs—

Ed. Where, linnet, where?

Elf. Why, in my unsung song.

Ed. Have at thee!

[Throws one of his bracelets at her.]

There—take that, and get thee gone!

Elf. (haughtily and with anger). Hurled favors are more vile than proffered slights.

Keep thou thy gold—I'll keep my dignity.

[Exit.]

Ed. (looking after her, musingly). There's something in the jade preserves my liking,
Yet she doth try me. Now, an he come not
To-morrow— Let me see—'twill be two moons,
And this one's far awane. Now let me see!

[Enter OSWALD.]

Ha! Oswald.

Osw. Sire, thy recreant knight is come!
He doth but stay to freshen his attire
Ere he doth wait upon your Majesty.

Ed. Bid him come hither as he is. Stay, Oswald.

How looks he?

Osw. Why, not as your Majesty!

His brow is smooth, his eyes are lined with smiles,

He doth comport him blithely.

Ed. Yea?

Osw. Even so—

As though his thoughts fed sweetly on a past
Known only to himself.

Ed. Thou never likedst him!

Osw. Oh, him, my lord, himself I always
liked.

It was his manner unto thee that galled me.

Ed. Well, go, and bid him hither.

[Exit OSWALD.]

O' my word,

The priest in him hath murdered a good knight.

But he did e'er hate Athelwold. Ay, ay,

For all he saith not, it is plain as drinking.

[Enter ATHELWOLD.]

Ah, friend, good greeting. Why, thou'rt somewhat pale!

How's this? Thy brow is drawn. I have been told

Thou wert in different temper?

Ath.

Ay, my liege?

Ed. Nay, no "my lieges"—none o' that. Come
on,
Give me thy hands, and draw that inner veil
Which doth o'erhang thine eyes. What news?
Atb. Indeed,
Such news hath been a heavy weight to carry.

Ed. How! Heavy?

Atb. Ay!

Ed. In what way? Is she dead?

Atb. No; that were better.

Ed. Better?

Atb. (with a sudden effort). Ay! Know, Ed-
gar,
That this so vaunted paragon of beauty
Hath nothing but her father's lands and state
To cry her fair.

Ed. Is she not beautiful?

Atb. No, as I live! A little, pale-faced girl,
Whose gold doth bless her purse and not her
head.

Ed. Not beautiful?

Atb. Not so much beauty, sire,
As would make full the pocket of thine eye.

Ed. That's strange—that's very strange! Not
beautiful?

Atb. All that is hers of beauty, sire, could hide
Beneath a freckle.

Ed. Not a fair shape, even?

Atb. A church tower hath more roundness.

Ed. What! in all—
 In all uncomely?
Atb. Ay, to the very quirking of her eyebrows.
Ed. How by report some women do seem
 beauties,
 Whose grandmothers, perhaps, were fairly nosed!
Atb. A woman's fair according to her gold.
Ed. (anxiously). Thou'rt sure thou saw'st her?
 None was palmed on thee?
 Women are apt contenders in such games.
Atb. It was the lady's self I saw.
Ed. Thou'rt sure?
 How art thou certain? By what didst thou
 know?
Atb. By certain marks report had given her—
 A mole that kissed her upper lip; a vein
 That spilt its tender blue upon her eyelid
 As though the cunning hand that dyed her eyes
 Had slipped for joy of its own work.
Ed. (suspiciously). For joy?
Atb. Did I say joy?
Ed. Ay.
Atb. It was scorn I meant.
Ed. Well, on.
Atb. She hath such little spots of white
 Upon her finger-nails as foam doth leave
 On stranded shells.
Ed. (more suspiciously). That sounds not so
 uncomely.

Ath. Thou shouldst but see it !

Ed.

Well, go on.

Ath. And last—

Upon her shoulder is a tiny redness

Which could be compassed by the pretty circles

That paint a moth's wing. Such a mark as
though

Nature, completing all, had laid a kiss

Upon her perfect work.

Ed. (furiously). Dost dare to mock me ?

Ath. Mock thee ?

Ed. Ay, mock me. Dost thou dare to do it ?

Ath. I do not mock thee.

Ed. Then what didst thou mean

When thou didst say "upon her perfect work?"

Ath. Oh, 'twas in mockery, but not of thee.

Ed. Of what then ?

Ath. (with an effort). Of the one I did de-
scribe.

Ed. (sullenly). Jests with my humor do as ill
accord

As gay-hued flowers with the dead. I wonder

That thou hast ta'en that turn with me to-day,

Of all days.

Ath. I will jest no more.

Ed. (in part appeased). Thou'rt wise

Above most jesters, who will seldom stop

Until that anger trips their heels. But speak ;

How camest thou so to lag ?

Ath. I fell asleep
While riding slowly—a dear trick o' mine—
And also from my horse, thus broke my leg,
Which same is yet an enemy to speed.

Ed. (suspiciously). Hum!

Ath. Didst thou speak?

Ed. (controlling himself). But inwardly.

Ath. In truth,
Would thou hadst gone thyself.

Ed. For why?

Ath. For that
Thou mightst have been thyself's own disap-
pointer.

It was a sorry office, Edgar—ay,
From first to last, and makes me hug my sins
To know Heaven cannot honor me with er-
rands!

Ed. (somewhat ashamed of his doubts). Tut!
I am not ungrateful.

Ath. Then methinks
Ingratitude hath been baptized again
Since my departure. Give his latest name.
What! I do go on this soul-irking mission,
Ride day and night, endure in divers ways,
Haste back in spite o' pain and storms, and then
Am suppered on a frown? Oh, it is well!—
Most well, most princely!

Ed. (suddenly coming forward). Tut! I'll bear
with thee.

Let's make a duty of forgetting. More!
Report is killed, and stuffed with his own lies.
We'll roast him at the fire o' friendship. Come!
[Exeunt.]

[Enter SIGEBERT and FROTHI.]

Sig. She's uncomely, you say?

Fro. As what's left o' my great-grandam.

Sig. Why, how, then, came all these reports of
her beauty?

Fro. Along the great highway where the Levite, Falsehood, doth pass Truth by on the other side. She hath moneys. Gold is a specific for the removal o' homeliness. For each gold piece a maid getteth there doth disappear a freckle. Four hundred marks will make a Grecian nose out o' a pig's snout. Thou wilt find that a big mouth doth shrink with wealth, like a doublet with washing. Thou shalt find old age double on herself like a hare, do thou but line her warren with gold.

Sig. But it is so generally accredited. There is no man in England but hath heard of it. 'Tis the fifth gospel. Be serious. The lady is plain?

Fro. As thine own nose.

Sig. Go to! Is she cramped in stature?

Fro. Thou wouldst take me for a giant an we walked together. Yet she is so tricked out in an elaborate ugliness that, cut in simple fash-

ion, 'twould amply gown a hundred fair-sized women.

Sig. I cannot get it from my head that there hath been foul play.

Fro. Then get it by thy heart that there hath not.

Sig. Thou sawest her?

Fro. Why, she was the pattern whereby my dreams were cut for a sennight, and every night would I wake the scullion at my bed's foot with crying out to be saved from torment.

Sig. Still, I like it not.

Fro. Thou wouldst like it less didst thou see her.

Sig. I see by the roving i' thine eyes that thou art hungry. Come, and we will crack a quart of ale and this problem together.

Fro. I'm with you. [Exeunt.]

[Enter ATHELWOLD.]

Atb. I cannot bear his eyes. I'll tell him all, From start to finish. He shall go with me Into the very byways of my sin. Yea, by great God, though I do lose his friendship, I'll be friends with myself—not one hour more Will I endure mine own soul's scorning. Yet, To lose her were to lose the way to heaven. Heaven? What is heaven but a priestly bait

To lure us to their ends, when that hell's whip
 Doth fail to lash us to 'em? Ay, again—
 And who hath not some unpronouncèd charm
 That would make swing the opposite poles of life
 And fasten heaven on hell's foundation? Out!
 What am I who doth rail against the fate
 That binds mankind? The atom of an atom,
 Particle of this particle the earth,
 That with its million kindred worlds doth spin
 Like motes within the universal light.
 What if I sin—am lost—do crack my life
 Against the gateless walls of Fate's decree?
 Is the world fouler for a gnat's corpse? Nay—
 The ocean—is it shallower for the drop
 It leaves upon a blade of grass? And yet
 To meet his eyes—to feel his hand—to listen
 Unto his words of trust—O God! O God!
 I walk unworthily the red-hot ploughshares,
 And am unto my spirit's marrow scorched!

[Enter OSWALD.]

Osw. Ahem!

Ath. (coldly). Sir, didst thou call me?

Osw. Who—I?

Ath. Yes.

Didst thou not speak?

Osw. Not I.

Ath. Thou mad'st some sound,

As if to call my notice.

Osw. Thoughts, my lord.
Mayhap I coughed—I have a hoarseness lately.
Ath. (contemptuously). Ay, very lately—since
an hour, I think.
Osw. What will your lordship come at?
Ath. The conclusion—
Osw. Well, sir?
Ath. (with a sneer). That thou’rt most apt at
catching cold.

Give way!

Osw. My lord?
Ath. Give way! I tell thee, monk;
It is my humor to ride forth.

Osw. My lord,
I venture to intrude upon your lordship,
To stay your lordship for a moment longer.
I’ve something to return your gracious lordship.
Even this.

[Stretches out a long golden hair between
his fingers.]

Ath. Dost thou dare jest with Athelwold?

Osw. Nay, o’ my word, no jest. As I am
true,
It is the finest thread o’ thrice-spun gold,
The daintiest mimic of the spider’s floss,
Spun by old Earth from out her golden entrails,
That e’er I set mine eyes on.

Ath. What dost speak?
’Ware how thou troublest me.

Osw. Why, sure, my lord,
Thou wouldst not have me keep thy gold?

Ath. What gold?
No mummary. Answer.

Osw. I will give it thee.

[Winds it with a quick gesture around and
around ATHELWOLD's fingers.]

Ath. Ah, dog? Thou'lt do it. Thou'lt make
sport of me?

Thou wilt? Thou wilt? Ay, do it! Do it,
then,

Pitiful mongrel! Have I broken thy back?

I hope so. [Exit ATHELWOLD.]

Osw. (getting with difficulty to his feet). May
thou be thrice damned for this!

God's me! I am in pieces. Oh, thou upstart!

Dog, am I? Ay, then. Dog, then. And more
sure

Upon the scent than e'er thou dreamest.

[Exit.]

[Enter EDGAR.]

Ed. I have much wronged myself in wronging
him.

The pulse o' th' time beats to a feverish measure,

And men draw in contagion with their creeds

As babes the germs o' character with their milk.

Suspicion is by nature vagabond,

And oft doth change his house. From Oswald's
breast

He crept to my protection. He hath tricks
Of voice and gesture that are burs for sticking.
I was more full of them than sheep-dog's coat
With actual bristles. I am glad, in truth,
To find my faith again, though 't hath been
rained on,
And vow to wear it ever i' the place
Of more eye-gladdening but less sure-woven garments.
The man himself!

[Enter ATHELWOLD with head down as though
brooding.]

Friend, why so heavily?

Atb. (starting). Thou, Edgar?

Ed. Ay, myself; this is well met.
I have good news for thee. First, there is this:
I am unsaddled of my spleen, good comrade,
And wax more light-heeled than a colt with joy
To think myself and England still are queenless.
Smile I not, sir, unweddedly? Why, look you,
The letter o' this law doth suit me well,
And I find "quean" with an "a" more to my
liking
Than "queen" with an "e."

Atb. Yet, I am sorry for't.

Ed. Cheer, cheer! 'Twas not thy doing.
Shall we ride
A-hawking? Ho, there!

Ath. Nay, I would suggest
Some serious matters to your Majesty.

Ed. My Majesty forbids that term ; to thee
I am but Edgar, and my crown a circle,
Merely a circle, with no further hint
Of meaning than that to be circular
Is to be round.

Ath. What I would say to thee
Is this: Though Olgar's daughter hath indeed
So little of the bounty Nature gives,
Yet is she rich in that which men do filch
From Nature. I, as thou dost know, am irked
With owing. Were it not a crafty stroke
To ask this maiden's hand in marriage, sir,
Even for myself? No—I will not think on't.
Her memory comes upon me with a crash.
Come! Let us go a-hawking. I would rather
Owe the gold-bearing tree of Grecian fable
His whole year's fruit than be her debtor in
love

Even for a moment. Let's a-hawking—

Ed. Soft you ;
This hath mine ear.

Ath. (wildly). Ay, but thou hast not seen her.
Why, the mere memory of her lips, my friend,
Is one with madness.

Ed. Well, well. Let me see.

Ath. Ay, couldst thou see ; but come on—I'm
amort

With thinking on it. Then her eyes—sweet
saints!

Couldst thou but picture them!

Ed. Is she so vile?

Ath. (dazedly). So vile?

Ed. Ay, saidst thou not?

Ath. (recovering himself). Oh, ay, indeed.

I did but wonder that thou questionedst me.

Most vile—most vile—most vile.

Ed. Thou sayst it sadly.

Ath. Yea, doth it not seem sad how ugly maids
Are friends with Mammon? Ho, there! Ho,
there! Ho!

King Edgar's falcons!

Ed. Not so fast, good friend.

I bulge with this idea—give it again,

More lengthily.

Ath. Pray you, forget it.

Ed. Nay,

'Tis a sound plan, a sound plan, Athelwold.

Come, put up with her lips and eyes. Come,
now!

Canst thou not woo her i' th' dark?

Ath. Oh, please you,

I'm sorry that I spoke; giv't no more thought
Than had I sneezed, or coughed, or torn my
cloak.

Let me forget what ought to be forgotten.

Wilt thou thy gloves?

Ed. I tell thee thou'rt a fool
An thou dost not to pocket with this plan.
Why, let her wear a mask, go always veiled,
Keep to her own apartments—anything—
So we do see the glimmer of her gold.
Now, be advised. Nay, I command thee.

Atb. Soft,
Soft, soft ; remember thou'st laid by thy king-
hood
While we're together. Is't a friendly office
To sell thy friend for so much coinage ?

Ed. Nay,
But thine own prospects—thine own ease !

Atb. Pah ! prospects !
To get mine armor dented honestly,
Owe all men but my King, and die ere age
Hath set my wits to wagging with my chin—
These are my aspirations. I've one other.

Ed. And that ? Come ! give me word—hast-
en ! And that ?

Atb. Is to be put complete into my grave,
Nor leave a child to dare the possible.

Ed. Go to ! Go to !

Atb. Ay, Edgar, thou mayst laugh,
But I am earnest in this thing. 'Tis writ
That children shall their parents honor. Yea,
And I do tell thee, parents owe as much
Unto the beings they unquestioned bring
Into this troublous world !

Ed. What! serious?

Ath. Unto the utmost limits of my nature.
Edgar, thou hast my full respect in this,
But do not urge me further.

Ed. Nay, I will, though.
This thy respect is easy as a faldstool.
When the occasion's past, why, thou canst clap it
Into thy pocket and be off straightway.

Ath. The occasion for respect unto my monarch
Shall never pass. One thing I pray thee, Edgar:
As thou dost love me, give not overhearing
Unto that Oswald. He is quick to learn
The crookings o' men's humor, and hath wit
That in fine language, as in courtiers' robes,
Doth dress his peasant soul.

Ed. I'll note him. Come,
We can discuss these matters as we ride.

[Enter a SERVANT, hurriedly.]

Ser. My liege, my liege! the dame Elfheda—

Ed. Well?

Ser. She hath been taken seriously ill;
I am sent hither by her women.

Ed. Well?

Ser. She calls for thee; naught will appease
her. Sir,
For God's love, hasten!

Ed. Oh, I know her feignings!

Go on, I'm coming. Athelwold, remain ;
I will not long be gone. [Exit.]

Ath. Is this myself? Doth this my haughty
body

Consent to hold my present spirit? Oh,
Methought this flesh o' mine would have dissolved
With very loathing of its craven life ;
Yet this my heart doth thrive on liar's blood ;
And what hath poisoned peace hath not so much
As turned a hair of seeming. What! get children
To face Perhaps? What! men be born of me,
That the foul river of my veins may flow
To taint the future with a race of liars?
No! let my sins and me pack one sure grave,
Nor leave a ghost behind. Yet 'tis not new.
These tugs with destiny have wrenched the cords
Of longer friendships—ay, of better friends ;
And love of woman hath caused hate of man
Since David sent to bloody death the mate
Lawful of her whom he unlawful loved!
And yet to do't, and yet to leave't undone.
There are her eyes to keep me dauntless ; yet
His eyes are here to shake that dauntlessness.
O God, thou knowest that my soul's desire
Is unto him, the friend of my glad youth.
Yea, and thou knowest, Satan, the desire
Of all my throbbing veins is unto her,
Without whom life were death ; with whom,
death—life.

ACT V

SCENE I.—A Room in OLGAR's Castle. EL-
FREDA and ATHELWOLD.

Elf. Away! thou wouldst not kiss me.

Atb. I would.

Elf. I say thou wouldst not.

Atb. And I that I would, and will. So!

Elf. Fie! A husband for a sennight, and yet
kiss thy wife?

Atb. Wouldst have me kiss another man's?
Look! Thy hair!

Elf. What's with it?

Atb. 'Tis loose, 'tis falling (pulls her hair down).
Ah, it hath fallen.

Elf. Oh, a fig for thee! More o' thy tricks?
Let be—let be—some one comes this way.

Atb. Where?

Elf. I thought I heard a step.

Atb. Out on thee! Thou saidst that to be free
of my fingering. For what wilt thou let me kiss
thee through that rip i' thy left sleeve?

Elf. For a love-sick boy. There! Go to!
Wait, though. Thou hast something on thine
eyelash.

Atb. Thou hast something under thine.

Elf. What?

Ath. Two devils in blue, which thou dost call eyes for want of a better name.

Elf. Oh, thou art past all reason. But an hour gone I was set down by thee as an angel. Now thou wilt have't that mine eyes are devils. My poor eyes! What have they done that's devilish?

Ath. Killed content.

Elf. What! art thou not contented?

Ath. No.

Elf. Not contented?

Ath. No, I say.

Elf. Not contented?

Ath. I tell thee, no.

Elf. Now, o' my word! Well—for why, then?

Ath. For that I have not been thy husband these twenty years.

Elf. Ha! ha! ha! Why, thou hadst had a wife in swaddling bands! Ha! ha! ha! I tell thee thou'rt out o' all reason.

Ath. So that I am in thy good graces I care not.

Elf. Well, do not sit on my gown.

Ath. Pah! I do honestly think that a woman's temper is tacked to her gown. Do thou but pull her gown a hair's-breadth, her temper flies i' thy face.

Elf. That were a pretty roost!

Ath. What?

Elf. That nose o' thine. Oh, I love thee.

[Throwing herself into his arms.]

Atb. I am glad o't, sweetheart. Why so suddenly?

Elf. Oh, I know not. For that thou looked at me.

Atb. Now thou'st done it.

Elf. How?

Atb. Thou'lt ne'er get me to look away from thee.

Elf. Then so.

[Covers his eyes with her hands.]

Atb. (taking down her hands, and with sudden seriousness). Look thou—as thou wert on thy death-bed. Unto what measure dost thou love me?

Elf. Beyond the stretch of space. It is as though all love since time began were packed into the holding of my heart.

Atb. Wilt thou swear it?

Elf. Ay.

Atb. Wilt thou kneel and swear it?

Elf. Ay.

Atb. On my sword?

Elf. Ay, on thy sword, thyself, thy love, thy God. What! Dost thou doubt me?

Atb. No—not thee.

Elf. What, then?

Atb. That this should last. Look thou: I am

gentle, but milk frozen is hard—ay, hard and cold. Were I to doubt thee—

Elf. Well?

Atb. All that's now warm would freeze.

Elf. How strange thou art!

Atb. Belike I am. See that thou art true. I have given much for thee; more than thou knowest. Let us without. I am an enemy to housed air. Come!

[Exeunt.]

SCENE 2.—A Room in EDGAR'S Palace.

[Enter ELFLEDA and OSWALD.]

Elf. Is it not time?

Osw. Perhaps.

Elf. I say it is.

Let not "perhaps" affront me. He'll walk here
In this same gallery for an hour or so,
Ere he goes forth to play at quoits. Thou'lt
speak him?

Osw. 'Tis in my mind.

Elf. Well, set it free. How long
Have they been wedded?

Osw. Full a month.

Elf. Then speak.
Here is the King. Thou'lt do it?

Osw. Leave't to me.

Elf. If thou'lt inflame him, I've an uncut emerald

Shalt sleep with thee to-night.

Osw. I thank thee, madam.
Leave him to me.

Elf. Nay, wait. Hast thought it over?
What is thy speech?

Osw. My wit shalt be the prompter.
I know not. Leave't to me. He's here.

Elf. Remember.
[Exit ELFLEDA.]

[Enter EDGAR.]

Ed. My falcons! ho, my falcons! (Seeing OSWALD.) There, sir? Come,
Foot it awhile. Nay, I'll not ride a-hawking.
I have bethought me of an irksome stiffness,
Caught yesterday while sleeping. Gods! I am
weary
Of everything!

Osw. Now, if Lord Athelwold
Were here, my liege. He doth so know your
humor.

Ed. Ay; but he's sick o' love, as I of nothing.

Osw. What! is love nothing?

Ed. Ay, Sir Priest, to you,
Or should be. I will have my falcons, now
I've thought of it again. Would Athelwold
Were here, in truth! There's Metal, my good
monk!

A sportsman to the edges of his nails.
Would love were done with him!



“REMEMBER”

Osw.

Your Majesty—

Ed. Well? Well?

Osw. You were not e'en deceived in aught—
But no, I will not say't. I fear your wrath
May strike the tree ere that its fruit be ripe.

Ed. What tree? What fruit?

Osw. The tree o' my dear duty
Unto your Majesty; the fruit of loyalty.

Ed. This hath been taken from an unpreached
sermon,

Hath't not, good Oswald? 'Tis too fine for me.
I like your downright speech that pelts like hail,
Or flies like chips beneath the sharp axe-blows
Of some keen mind against the Tree o' Knowl-
edge.

That tree I've heard of, but the tree o' duty
My woodcraft knows not. Come! Deceived,
thou saidst.

What of deceived?

Osw. Oh, 'twas a thought.

Nay, I'll be brave in this; I'll not dissemble,
Even though my truth should prove my death.

Your Majesty,

There have been tales of late.

Ed. Well, on; what tales?

Hast thou yet tried that new-marked tennis
court?

But of these tales?

Osw. 'Twill hit your heart-ribs, sire.

Ed. Well, word it. As we talk of ribs, Sir
Monk,
There is a boy in Essex, they do say,
Can crack an ox's ribs in one arm-crotch.
If this be true, we'll have him brought to Court.
But of these tales?

Osw. Belike, sire, I do irk you ;
They touched on one your Majesty well loves.

Ed. Ha ?

Osw. Ay, my liege.

Ed. On whom ?

Osw. On Athelwold.

Ed. On Athelwold ?

Osw. None other.

Ed. Pah ! more lies.

Well, what is it they say ?

Osw. Oh, sire, belike
It is but lies. I do regret me much
Of having spoken.

Ed. Nay, what is it ?

Osw. Sire,
I fear thou wilt blame me for blaming him.
Yet 'tis not I who blame him ; I did hear't
From—

Ed. Ay, ay ; from whom didst thou hear it ?

Osw. Why,
Frothi, the page of Athelwold, doth talk
Sometimes in's sleep. But saints ! All of us
know

A sleepy tongue doth give but crooked meaning.

I trust no man will ever judge me, sire,
By th' words I speak in sleep.

Ed. What said he? On,
On; thou dost know my temper. What said
he?

Osw. Oh, he let fall some broken words. Indeed,

Indeed, your Majesty, urge me not to't.

'Tis an ungracious office at the best,

To smirch the soul's gear of an absent man.

Ed. Nice scruples lately learned, good Oswald.
Come,

Give me these rumors.

Osw. Rumors?

Ed. Ay, ay, ay—
These rumors—words—sleep-tellings—I care not
How thou baptizest them. The words—the
words.

Osw. I cannot now recall them but in fragments.

Ed. The fragments, then—the fragments.

Osw. Well, for one,
He said—

Ed. Go on—go on.

Osw. As I recall it,
He said some such like words (I pray you grace
If I do hesitate, but 'tis my wish

To be in all things just). The words were these :

“She is too beautiful.” Yes, that was it.
Twice o’er he said it : “She’s too beautiful.”

Ed. What she ?

Osiv. I know not. That is what I’d know.

Ed. God’s eyes ! Is this thy wondrous tale ?

Dost know

This hath the sister look to impudence ?

Why, out of question, ’twas some comely wench

The boy had dreamed of kissing. Look you,
priest,

I’ve ne’er brooked lightness ; shall I brook it now
My heart is heavy ?

Osiv. Sire, this was not all.

Ed. Not all ? Go on.

Osiv. He next did cry aloud,

“This fair Elfreda—”

Ed. Ha !

Osiv. “This fair Elfreda

Hath mischief in her eyes !”—no—wait—

Ed. How no ?

How no ? Said he not that ? Have care—have
care.

Osiv. Not that precisely. It was, so I think—
“This fair Elfreda hath—”

Ed. Elfreda ?

Osiv. “Hath
A devil in her eye.” Yea, that was it.

Not "mischief"—"devil"—'twas this "devil,"
sire,

Did puzzle me.

Ed. This "fair Elfreda?"

Osw. Ay,

Fair was the word.

Ed. Well, well ; and if it was,
There may be ten Elfredas known to him.

Well ?

Osw. Ay, there may.

Ed. Was this all ?

Osw. Good, my lord,
Let this next matter sleep.

Ed. Thou know'st me not,
Or else too well do know me, when thou speak'st
Of pausing here to let the scent grow cool.

Come, was there more ?

Osw. Ay, sire, one sentence.

Ed. Well, sir ?

Osw. He saith, "Old Olgar favors it."

Ed. "Old Olgar?"

Osw. "Else might I hope—"

Ed. Olgar ?

Osw. As I do live.

Ed. Thou damnèd, blue-jowled, sleek, crown-
shaven monk !

Thou hast invented this ! Ay, to my foot !

What ! thou wilt come and tongue my best-loved
friend,

And think thy throat in safety? Know, thou
liar—

Liar and coward—that Lord Athelwold
Is set as high above thy power to hurt him
As God's throne over mine!

Osw. How, sir—how, sir—
Wilt murder me for following my duty?

Ed. Duty? It is the most ill-usèd word
That ever lent excuse unto a crime!
Duty? Thy duty? Give me honest sin,
And 'twill show fair beside such duty!

Osw. Sire—

Ed. Speak not to me! What! thou didst
dare— O God!

Wilt thou endure the service of a hound
That I, a mortal king, do spit upon?
What! this of Athelwold? To me? To me?
And thou still there!

Osw. Sire, there is more than this.

Ed. Name but his name, and with my very
hands

I'll tear thy tongue out. Dog! Begone! begone!
Out o' my sight! [Exit OSWALD.]

Oh shame, that I have listened
Unto such treachery! I have been trapped—
Trapped like a fox, and with a fox's cunning.
Ay, ay, thou nimble-witted liar thou!
Ay—for thou art a liar—naught else were possible.

Thou shalt hear more o' this! To come to me,
Thy King, with this the scrapings o' the dish
Of thy fat envy; lies so like the truth
That one less sure might well have been ensnared.
And yet, though I myself am most assured,
I owe it unto him to prove him true.

This bag o' spleen, this Oswald, this cowed
Satan,

Shall not be pleased with noting my displeasure.
What, ho, there! ho, there! ho, there, Oswald!

Osw. Sire, didst thou call?

Ed. Art thou a fool, Sir Priest,
As well as knave? Stand there—no nearer—
there!

Thou think'st belike that thou hast proved the
falseness

Of my Thane Athelwold?

Osw. Nay, sire.

Ed. Thou dost,
Liar, thou dost. By Heaven! it gives me joy
To think how thou wilt writhe to find him true.
I'll prove his truth before all England. Ay,
And then I'll give them word of the fair part
Thou didst unto him. (Laughs.) Dost thou
hear, Sir Priest,

I long to see thee. Thou shalt ride thyself
And bid him hither. Dost thou hear? Away,
And bid him hither o' the instant!

[Exit EDGAR]

Osw. (looking mockingly after EDGAR as he goes out). Sire,
Thy gentle order shall be straight fulfilled.
Most noble Edgar, most beloved monarch,
Most gentle, courteous, kind, and just of kings,
Such pleasure doth it give me to obey
Thy sweet commands that I'll not even tarry
To spur me, but will ride cowed as I am
To bid him to thee (laughing)—ay, to bid him
to thee. [Exit OSWALD.]

SCENE 3.—Another Room in the Palace.

[Enter EDGAR, followed by ELFLEDA.]

Ed. 'Twill be some time before they come.
Sit—sit.

A woman's foot-sound is a galling thing
When all thy soul's awry. Sit down and sing;
Thou'rt ever ready with thy singing.

Elf. Well,
What shall I sing? (Aside.) It works! It works!
Brave Oswald,
Thou shalt a bishopric for this! (Aloud.) My
liege,
What song wilt have?

Ed. Why, any; I care not—
I care not. Madam, tell me, didst thou e'er
Hold speech with Frothi, page to Athelwold?

Elf. Ay, sire, an honest boy. He was well
liked

At court, though I have heard the scullions say
He was a noisy bedfellow. What song
Didst thou name, sire?

Ed. Noisy? How, noisy?

Elfl. Noisy?

There's no such song I know of. Oh, I see!
Thou'rt still on the Thane's page. Oh, noisy,
sir,

Like most boys in their sleep: hard breathing,
restless,

Given to mutterings—one o' your sleep-talkers.

Ed. Sleep-talker? Did they call him that?
Sleep-talker?

Elfl. Ay, 'twas the word. But thou'st not
named a song.

Ed. Oh, any, woman! (*Aside.*) Hum! sleep-
talker!—hum!

This looks as though they had all this concocted
Between themselves. Oh, I will be suspicious
Of mine own lineage and legitimacy
Ere I misdoubt his littlest action. Yet,
If he were false, 'tis in my soul to hate
Unto the measure that I love! False? Pah!
I shame myself to even so much as name it.

Elfl. Thou dost not wish a song, then?

Ed. Ay, a dozen,

A dozen, so thou'lt leave me to my thoughts.
Choose anything and sing it. Sing—sing—sing.
[Throws himself upon a settle.]

Elf. (sings):

The fen-cricket's chatter,
The marsh-owls whoo.
Now what is the matter?
Speak one; speak two.
"Oh, the elves are here,
And much we fear
They will kill our bairnies
For lack o' cheer!"

The elves are nimble,
The elves are quick;
The fen-cricket's wimble,
The owls wax sick.
Soft, now; give ear:
I much do fear
They killed those bairnies
For lack o' cheer!

Ed. As damp a song as e'er I heard. Methinks
One might catch cold by listening to such songs;
The very marsh air's in it. Dost thou know
A healthy song with more o' sunshine in't?
Hark, there! You, madam—you. Canst not be
quiet?
Oh, how these women's dresses shriek withal
When thou wouldst most be still! That voice I
heard—
I could have sworn 'twas Athelwold's!

[Enter ATHELWOLD and OSWALD.]

Why, friend !

God save thee ! There is magic in this speed.
How got'st thou here in such short time, my
Thane ?

Ath. Why, Oswald, sire, did meet me at thy
gates.

Ed. My soldier ! Saints ! but I am glad to
grip thee !

Come, both thy hands. Sir Monk, remain.
Look, Brother,

Thou'rt come at a good time. 'Twill be but
just

That I do now return thy visit. Ay,
Stare not upon me. Thou there, sir, go not.
I purpose, Athelwold, to honor thee
By visiting thy castle. Ay, to-night
I'll sup with thee and with thy lady, man ;
This very night.

Ath. Sup with me ?

Ed. (impatiently). Ay—ay—ay.
You started !

Ath. 'Twas for pleasure—'twas for pleasure.

Ed. Pale, too ?

Ath. No—am I pale ?

Ed. (apprehensively). Ay—smooth thy brow,
Put on a bolder air. I'll tell thee all.
Shake off that look—that look.

Ath. Thou'lt sup with me?—
To-night?

Ed. (with amazement and a sort of shamed sorrow). Ay—still that look.

Ath. It is an honor
Past my deserving.

Ed. Tush! That game to me?
Go to! go to!

Ath. Sire, if thou couldst but tarry,
But give me time to offer thee a welcome
Worthy thy state and majesty.

Ed. What! this
From Athelwold to Edgar? Majesty?
State? Thou to me—of state and majesty?
Am I not welcome?

Ath. Welcome? Oh, indeed,
To th' utmost. But my wife! It doth seem just
That she be warned, so that she may prepare
Such welcome as her woman's vanity
Would joy to offer.

Ed. Why, I say, have done.
I'll come in such old trappings, good my Thane,
As will put ceremony out of place.
Yet, if thou'dst do't, ride on, and I will follow.

Ath. (going.) Then I will go o' th' instant.
Short farewell.

Ed. Why, rest thee, man. What is thy haste?

Ath. None—none—
None, o' my word.

Ed. (watching his nervous movements). Why,
art thou restless ?

Atb. Who ?

I? I'm not restless.

Ed. But thine eyes !

Atb. Look, sire :

Why hast thou kept the priest ?

Ed. Oh, for a whim.

He frets thee ? Bid him hence.

Atb. (to OSWALD). Away with thee !

Osw. Your lordship's will in all.

[Exit OSWALD.]

Atb. (looking after him and speaking between
his teeth). Obsequious hound !

I see thy part in this.

Ed. What's that thou saidst ?

Speak out.

Atb. Mere habit ; I but thought aloud.

Edgar, why wilt thou keep this fellow near thee ?

Ed. I keep him not. A sly knave.

Atb. A sly devil.

Ed. I think so.

Atb. And I know so. Would to God

I were thyself but for a heart-beat !

Ed. Why ?

Atb. To have him strangled. But if thou dost
purpose

To sup with me to-night—

Ed. I'm set on it.

Ath. Then pray you grant that I set forth at once.

My wife will blame me—

Ed. What! so soon submissive?

Ath. Ay, ay.

Ed. A shrew, then?

Ath. No—that is—in truth,
A vixen.

Ed. My poor Athelwold! cheer, cheer.
I have most dearly sold thee. Well, away, then.

Ath. I thank thee. [Exit.]

Ed. If he hath deceived me— Ho!
My falcons! there! without there! If in truth
He hath deceived me— Nay, I will not think it.
My falcons! [Exit.]

SCENE 4.—A Room in ATHELWOLD'S Castle.

ELFREDA playing with her dog. NURSE spinning.

Elf. Now, sir, up, up; sit up, I say; sit up;
And when I call the name of Athelwold
Give tongue. Now, sir! I' faith, sir, dost thou
know

That he, thy lord and mine, Thane Athelwold
(Speak, sir!), comes home to-night? Well done!
well done!

Well done! Nurse, mark him now. Say Athelwold,

And see how loyally he greets the name.

Nur. What! Athelwold — plain so. Well, I
have said it.

Elf. Lord, Lord, nurse! how thou dost out-
patience me!

How shall the poor beast guess thy meaning,
nurse,

When thou dost say't without a spark o' mean-
ing?

There, go, sir! — down! He answered fast
enough

When I spoke. Look you, nurse. Let's have a
game

O' love-making. Look; thou shalt be the gal-
lant,

I'll be thy lady. Oh, so much I'm won

That to be wooed again will seem most sweet!

Come, nurse. Now, nurse — good nurse. Come
on; come, nurse.

Nur. La, honey! what wilt have? Me be a
gallant?

La, in my kirtle!

Elf. Oh, we'll feign the doublet.

Now, nurse, down on thy knees!

Nur. Oh, please you, lamb,

I am so twinged with gout that e'en to God

I ease the distance with a footstool.

Elf. Well,

Here's one. Now kneel, and I will flout thee.

Nur. So—

Ugh! My poor limbs! Ugh, honey! I do creak
Like some old gate.

Elf. Well, never mind the creaking.
Woo! Woo!

Nur. O Lord, this is a sorry game!
How shall I woo?

Elf. Why, take my hand—dart fire
With both thine eyes—or one. Oh, as you
please.

Say, "Fairest lady, I am dying for thee!"

Nur. I am, indeed.

Elf. What?

Nur. Dying for thee. Oh!
Both legs are fast asleep.

Elf. Away with thee!
Get up. I'll be the gallant, and woo thee.
Now see how't should be done. "Most gracious
lady,

Upon my knees I do implore, beseech,
One gracious smile! Oh! oh! I swoon, I die
Because of thy rare beauty."

Nur. La, go to!

Elf. "Thy lovely eyes, thy beauteous nose, thy
lips
So like to cherries."

Nur. Oh, have done, thou mischief!
Thou'dst been a lad, I'll warrant thee!
Let me unto my spinning.

Elf. Well, go on,

Go on. I care not if thou'rt peevish. Nurse,
Where's my lord's armor?

Nur. Safely put aside,
As he did bid me.

Elf. Sweetest nurse, I know
Thou lovest me.

Nur. What now?

Elf. Only his helmet.
I have such yearning to try on his helmet.

Do, nurse! Look, I will kiss thee. There!—and
there!

Nur. Well, well. I verily believe, my lamb,
Thou'dst coax St. Peter to give up the keys
That thou mightst rummage heaven.

Elf. And, nurse—

Nur. Ay, honey?

Elf. His sword, nurse. Just his sword and
helmet, nurse.

Do hurry, nurse. I'll see thou getst no blame.

Nur. Well, well. I'll humor thee. [Exit.]

Elf. How long she tarries!

[Re-enter NURSE, with ATHELWOLD's helmet.]

Ah, sweetest nurse, here is thy kiss; and now
Give me the helmet. Ah, 'tis heavy—

Nur. Ay,
'Tis heavy, that I'll vouch for.

Elf. Look you, nurse,
I must his shield for mirror.

Nur. Oh, go to!
Well, then—thou must, then.
[Exit, and returns with shield.]

Here!
Elf. Oh, is't not bright!
Now, nurse, look I not like a warrior?

[Enter ATHELWOLD.]

Atb. Ha, my sweet warrior! Gods! how fair
thou art!

Come, kiss me—kiss me—kiss me.

Elf. Madam Nurse,
Thou canst unto thy spinning now.

Nur. (in a hurt voice). Oh, ay—
Oh, ay—I warrant thee. Now he is come,
Thy old nurse is as nothing. [Exit.]

Atb. Pray thee, dear,
Say some kind word to her. She's old, and loves
thee

Above her hope of heaven.

Elf. Not I, good sooth!
She is too peevish, and expects too much.
I care not to bestow where gifts are looked for.
Fair sir, how seem I in thy helmet?

Atb. Why,
A maiden knight in verity. Elfreda,
Dost love me less or more than yesterday?

Elf. More.

Atb. Art thou sure?

Elf. Sure? Oh, ay, sure enough.
Show me to swing thy sword—how is it?

Ath. Nay, thou dost not love me as thou didst!

Elf. Why, yes,
I do—I said so. Are all swords so long
As this one? Ugh! 'tis heavy.

Ath. Ay, 'tis heavy.
Heart of me, cease from play. I need thee more
To-day than I e'er needed thee.

Elf. What for?
Is't that old wound?

Ath. Ay, that old wound, my wife.
Come, sweet, and sit beside me. Thou shalt
listen

Unto a story such as thou dost love,
Of strange and curious happenings.

Elf. A love story?

Ath. In most a hate-story; but cheer, my heart,
There's love in it—ay, there is love in it.

Elf. Well, tell me.

Ath. Sit where I can see thy face.
There—that is well. There dwelt in Christen-
dom—

Elf. Oh, specify, or I care not to hear it.
Name town and country, knights and masters all,
Even to the dragon—if there be a dragon.

Ath. Well, well, love, as you will. There was
a knight
Dwelt in the town of London. A stanch knight,

Who loved his king, and was by him beloved.
His name was—Osric, and he loved the king.

Elf. And the king's name?

Ath. Geffry.

Elf. Methinks the knight

Was fairer christened. Canst not change the
names?

Ath. No, no; no matter; let me on. The
king—Geffry—

Elf. Now, why not call him Osric, dear,
An't pleases me?

Ath. Oh, Osric, then, the king.

Osric the king did one day seek his knight,
Sir Geffry, and did tell him how report
Had come to him of a most beauteous maiden,
Who dwelt in Warwickshire—a maid so fair
All England was most rich in rumors of her.

Elf. Why, that's like me.

Ath. Ay, 'tis. Geffry the king—

Elf. Osric, my love.

Ath. Osric, I mean—did urge
That Geffry should unto the maiden's home
To find if she were fair as men did say.
For if she were, he, Osric, did intend
To wed her, and to make her lawful queen
Of England.

Elf. Oh, most lucky maid! Her name?

Ath. Edwitha. Now, although in truth the
knight

Liked not the office, yet, since he loved his king,
He did put pride away, and straight set forth
For Warwickshire. There being arrived and
welcomed,

He found the maid so far above his wildest,
Most wine-helped dreams of beauty that from
wondering

He stepped to loving her.

Elf. To loving her?

Atb. To loving her, until there seemed no part
Of mind, soul, body, honor, left uneaten
Of this most ravenous love. He worshipped her.
She was his god, his heaven, his hope of heaven,
His king, his queen, his pride, his truth, his all.
So fused in this fierce fire were pride and faith
That to divide them, make them twain again,
Were unaccomplishable! He had bought
One of her kisses with a life of shame;
One year with her by twenty years in hell.
There was no limit to his recklessness,
No bound unto the blasphemy and woe
He would have dared to win her.

Elf. And the maid?

Atb. He thought she loved him.

Elf. Well, go on, go on.

Atb. He thought she loved him. Twenty
thousand times

She swore she loved him. Looks and lips and voice
All said she loved him.

Elf. And he?—he?
Ath. He yielded
 To this most perfectly devised temptation
 E'er set by Baal to trap a soul to ruin!
Elf. Yielded?
Ath. Ay, yielded. Canst thou credit it?
 Yielded. Forswore his manhood, honor, king,
 All that makes sleep a friend or night endeared.
Elf. And she was never queen?
Ath. Never!
Elf. Oh, shame!
 He was most foul of heart!
Ath. Foul is thy heart
 To say his heart was foul! O woman, woman,
 Wilt thou judge man? Will ye, whose veins
 are ice,
 Pronounce upon the passions of the men
 Who melt ye but can never kindle ye?
 Away! away! thou thing of snow. The fire
 Of love would make ye but a puddle! Oh,
 That ye should dare to call me foul of heart,
 Whose damning hath been lawless love of
 thee!
 Out on ye, lips! Out on ye, eyes, hair, hands,
 That have destroyed me!
Elf. Dost thou speak to me?
 What have I done?
Ath. What hast thou done? O God,
 Did Lucifer perchance so question thee



“DOST THOU SPEAK TO ME? WHAT
HAVE I DONE?”

Ere he was cast from heaven? What done?—
what done?

No, no; I am not yet a beast in all.

My heart hath split with this.

Elf. Nay, Athelwold,

How could I know thou spokest of thyself?

Ath. Thou shouldst have felt it. Oh, hadst
thou e'er loved me,

My face had been an open book to thee.

What! Thou didst think it all mere idle talk!

Elf. As I do live, I thought so.

Ath. Kneel and swear.

Elf. (kneeling). By all in heaven I swear it.

Ath. Wait! I choke.

Pray thee, undo my collar.

Elf. Athelwold!

Athelwold! Look at me. Dost thou believe
me?

Ath. Ay; but 'tis too much joy. Thy leave
awhile.

Let me lean so. There, do not touch me. Ah!

That's better—that is better. Do not touch
me—

Not yet.

Elf. How couldst thou think I meant it? Oh,
The gentlest men are cruel when they love!

Ath. Right hadst thou to reproach me. I'll
not budge

To vindicate mine error. Oh, my beauty,

My untamed hawk, my fierce, soft-footed tigress,
Come, set thy talons in me ! Come, despatch !
Rend me in pieces, so thou dost but touch me !

Elf. How thou dost love me !

Atb. Ah ; and even thou—
Thou dost not know to what extent. Again !
Tell me again thou didst not mean it.

Elf. Why,
Thou knowest that I did not.

Atb. Well, again—
Again—again. O lips, I cry ye pardon !
Sweet hair, sweet eyes, sweet hands, sweet throat
—all, all,

I cry ye grace ! Nay, stretch not in mine arms,
Lest I do crush thee for thy very sweetness !
But, heart, to reason. Darling, there's no time
To lose 'twixt now and nighttide.

Elf. How dost mean ?

Atb. Edgar hath been informed. That knave,
that Oswald,
Hath told him all. To-night he purposes
To sup with us.

Elf. To-night ?

Atb. Ay, this same night.

Elf. What must I do ?

Atb. I've thought upon it, heart.
There is one way, one only way to save us.

Elf. And that, my lord ?

Atb. That is for thee, my wife,

By some disguise, some stain on thy fair skin,
Some awkward combing of these graceful tresses,
To mar this fatal beauty which hath ruined me.

Elf. Make myself ugly?

Ath. Ay, as ugly, sweet,
As one so fair can look.

Elf. And let the King
Think that I'm hideous?

Ath. In truth, my heart,
The more he thinks thee hideous, the better
Thou'lt find some way. Come, we will ask thy
nurse;
She will assist thee. Swiftly, swiftly.

[*Exeunt.*]

A Glade in the Forest.

[*Enter EDGAR and FROTHI.*]

Ed. Well, boy, how lik'st thou to be mis-
tressed?

Fro. Sire,
Had she not such a beak, I'd love her well
For th' gold that lines her nest.

Ed. Is she so ugly?

Fro. Gods, sire! Thou shouldst but see her!
Thou wilt sup
But sparingly to-night.

Ed. How, boy?

Fro. Why, sire,
She'd take away the appetite o' a vulture.

But there's my master's horn. Thy pardon, sire.
I run to help thy welcome. [Exit.]

Ed. He's not false.

No, he hath not deceived me. This young lad
Wears the smooth, easy front of honesty.
Would now that I had lugged the priest along
To grieve at my rejoicing!

A Room in ATHELWOLD's Castle.

[Enter ATHELWOLD.]

Atb. It can be done. It can be done. That's
certain.

Would that her beauty were less palpable,
Less self-assertive! Nay—it can be done.
That faded gown, ill-shapen; then her hair
Brought low and covered by a dingy wimple;
No gems. Her eyebrows dusted o'er with flour.
Some dark stain on her pretty teeth. Yes, yes—
The nurse is faithful. Oh, 'tis certain—ay,
'Tis a sure thing. Would I had time myself
To look upon her ere she comes! But then
She hath her womancraft for handmaiden,
And knowledge of her possible fate withal
To egg her to it. Would it were to-morrow!
Or Edgar come and gone! To know thyself
That thou art lying is sufficient torture;
But when 'tis known to wife and servant, oh,
'Tis insupportable. I fear myself—
I fear myself in this. Yet she doth love me—

All else is nothing while that she doth love me.
Wilful, but dear in all, in all enchanting.
Would God 'twere over! Would to God 'twere
over!

O heart, thou hang'st too heavy. Cheerly, heart;
I have sore need of thee. Be stanch, good heart,
And break not with this monstrous weight.

[Enter EDGAR.]

Your Majesty—

Ed. I tell thee I've no majesty, my Thane,
When thou dost tax me with it, and in truth
Am urged to prove its lack by cuffing thee!
Out, sir! to thus besire and bemajesty
A king made sick with too much deference!

Ath. Wilt seat thee, Edgar? Supper will be
served

When my wife enters.

Ed. Ay, this wife o' thine.
Thou didst deserve a fairer fate, my Thane,
For truth. They say she has a nose withal
To make a pelican top-heavy.

Ath. Nay,
Her nose is well enough. 'Tis that she's sallow
And scorched by many summers. Then, alack!
She hath black teeth, which were a flaw had
marred

The Virgin Mary. Then, she's squarely shaped.
Well, well—but she hath gold.

Ed. Ay, gold. But, 'faith,
Thou shouldst be better spoused. I fear thy
children

May not translate thee justly.

Atb. (bitterly). Trust me, Edgar,
If e'er I have a child 'twill be no great
And bulky matter for't to do me justice.

Ed. Well, well, Sir Modesty. She tarries, sir,
Takes her own time, and, not content with that,
Filches her King's. Ha! ha!—I'll wager, man,
She stirs thee soundly.

Atb. Ay, sir.

Ed. Well, my ride
Hath set a keen edge to my appetite ;
I'll do thy viands justice—doubt me not.
How keepest Patience still a guest, my Thane,
In this old castle? Hast thou hawks? Good
sooth!

I'll send thee such a couple o' jashawks, man,
Would bring thee down an eagle.

Atb. No—no gifts,
For God's sake. That is, couldst thou know but
once

How she will rail at such diversion—

Ed. Well,
So be it. Seat thee, man. It seems to me
This trick o' walking rooms hath grown on thee.

Atb. Most like—most like. (Aside.) Saints!
What doth keep her?

Ed.

So ?

Ha ! ha ! 't may serve thee in good stead, Sir Knave,
If the young Thane should be a burner o' al-
nights.

Atb. Sir, shall we drink ? Ho, there ! some
wine !

Ed. Oh, ay.

I'll no more turn from wine than babes from milk.
Well, well ! I'm sorry thou'lt not take the jas-
hawks ;

But I've a barb. Doth your wife ride ?

Atb. No, no.

Ed. (laughing). Horses do shy at her, mayhap ?

Atb. Oh, ay.

I know not. Sometimes. Here's the wine. Kneel,
boy,

To serve a king. (Aside.) Gods ! will she never
come ?

Ed. Here's to thy truth.

Atb. And thine.

Ed. Zounds ! 'tis good wine.

Excellent well, i' faith.

Atb. The butt is thine.

Ed. Why, I'll not squiny at it. Look thee,
man—

Thou'lt take the barb now ?

Atb. No, no ; nothing—nothing !

Ed. I see thou'rt moved by something, Athel-
wold.

If 'tis thy wife's long tarrying that frets thee,
I know these women.

Atb. Yet, sir, she was robed
When I came forth to meet thee.

Ed. Oh, well, patience.
I know 'em, how they'll change and change their
fallals,

Then back again, then as they were at first,
Then back again. But wilt thou drink ?

Atb. No more.

Ed. One horn—but one. Come, quaff !

Atb. Well, then, one only.

Ah ! 'tis her foot !

Ed. Thy lady's ?

Atb. Ay. There—there—
There is the door she'll enter by.

Ed. Thou'rt pale.
Thy hand shakes. Lean on me. Why art thou
troubled ?

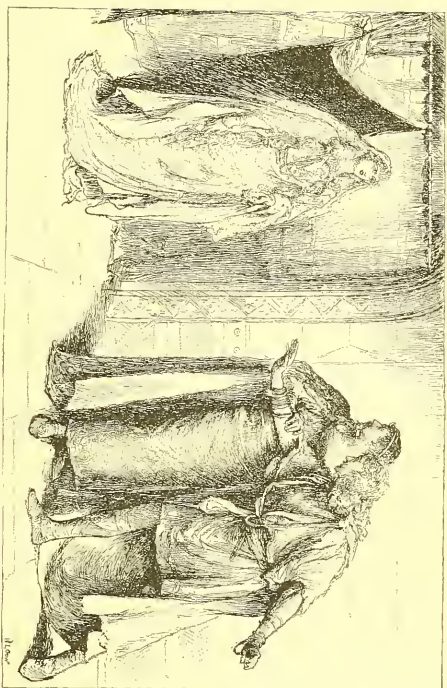
That door to th' middle there ?

Atb. Ay—that one—that one.
Now—

[Enter ELFREDA, slowly, blazing with jewels, and
with her wimple thrown back.]

God in heaven !

Ed. What is this—some trick ?
Speak, madam. You, sir, speak. God's eyes, sir !
Speak,



ENTER ELFREDA, BLAZING WITH JEWELS

When I command thee. Is that woman there—
I choke! I choke!—thy wife—Elfreda?

Ath.

Ay.

Elfreda, and my wife.

Ed.

What! thou dost say it?

Thou, madam—dost thou say so? Where's thy
tongue?

I will be answered. Know'st thou I'm the
King,

Edgar of England, who do question thee?

Art thou Elfreda, sometime child of Olgar,

The Earl of Devonshire?

Elf.

I am that Elfreda.

Ed. Oh God! My brain's on fire. Thou, Ath-
elwold,

Thou—thou— Come—lie again—tell me this
woman's

Thy wanton, not thy wife.

Ath.

Nay; she is both

My wife and wanton.

Elf.

Athelwold!—my lord—

Ath. Silence! Nor ever speak to me again.

Ed. Madam—sweet Heaven! I dream—this is
a dream.

I know I dream—but while it lasts 'tis awful!

Ath. Thou dost not dream. That woman is
Elfreda,

The daughter of the Earl of Devonshire.

I am her husband—Athelwold—thy friend!

Ed. Oh, horrible! Madam, knewest thou of this?

Elf. No—not until some minutes past, my liege.

Ed. What! false to thee as well? Oh, coward!

Ath. Nay,

Thou shalt not live to call me coward.

Elf. Ah!

Put up thy sword if but for love of me.

Ath. For love of thee? Harlot!

Elf. What! wilt thou dare?

Ed. Lady, fear not. I will protect thee. Sir, I cannot quite forget thee. Athelwold, Hast thou no word to say to me? No whisper? Nothing in explanation?

Ath. Nothing.

Ed. What!

Nothing? no word? Then thou wilt brave it out

I' the very teeth of scorn? Be comforted; Thou yet shall be the Queen of England, lady.

Ath. Now by the King of Heaven she shall not!

Ed. Sir!

Ath. I tell thee, Edgar, whether pure or vile She is my wife, and with my very blood I will protect what's left to me of honor, Though it be smaller than the littlest freckle Upon a lily.

Ed. Thou dost dare—dost dare?

Alb. (swinging ELFREDA behind him). This is
the wife of Athelwold the Thane.

Let no man touch her, though he were in all
Ten thousand times thy better and a king!

Ed. Slave!

Alb. By my sword! Now look I like a slave?
What! thou wouldst violate the marriage law
Beneath my very roof? Thou wouldst make free
With this my wife before my very eyes—
Unhood Adultery and slip the jesses
Of Rapine, and then think to see me bear it?
Lay but thy finger on her, and this sword,
Which in thy cause hath druek so much clean
blood,

Shall make thy heart its sheath!

Ay, thou mayst rage,
Ay, fume! Wert thou the King of twenty Eng-
lands

Thou shouldst not have this woman to thy
Queen!

Nor think it love that spurs me. No, oh God!
Love lies more deeper buried than the roots
Of this mad world. It is not, verily,
That I do love this woman as my wife,
But that as wife she hath some part in me,
And therefore shall not be dishonored. Back!
Back to your court, O Edgar, and remember
Kings should be subject to the laws they make,
As God himself is subject to his laws.

Ed. Wrongs me and words me too? Back,
sir, thyself!

Ath. So thou wilt dare me, then? Make her a
widow

And thou shalt have her!

Ed. Oh, I'll have her.

[They fight.]

Elf. Nay,

Gentlemen! gentlemen! My lord! God's love!

Will you be reasonable? Oh, help! help!

Help, there! Without there! Frothi! Frothi! Ho!

Ho, there! [Rushes out.]

Ed. Thou'rt wounded.

Ath. There is one for thee.

Ed. Bloodthirsty as a wolf. Again! Be
warned!

Ath. Have at thee! Wilt thou falter?

[They fight.]

Ed. Be thy blood

On thine own head!

Ath. Amen.

[Re-enter ELFREDA with FROTHI. ATHELWOLD
falls as they enter.]

All's done. Farewell, boy.

Thou wert true. [Dies.]

Elf. (struggling with EDGAR, who tries to hold
her). Unloose me! Nay, I will go to him! I
say I will! [Rushes to him.]



DEATH OF ATHELWOLD

Athelwold! Athelwold! My love! my lord!
My husband! Look, I'm here—I'm here! Thy
wife!

Elfreda! Oh, I meant it not! Look up!
Boy, he's not dead. Thou'rt keeping back the
air

By hanging over him. Away! My lord!
Athelwold! What? These stains upon my
hands!

Jewels, I hate thee! Off, ye traitors! Thus—
Thus do I rid me of my queenhood, thus
Return to thee. Look, I am stript of all
That wrought thy anger! Look, I'll tear my
face

With these my very nails until I seem
More vile than visible sin!

What! not a motion?
Boy, chafe his hands. Oh, I will follow thee.

[Swoons.]

Fro. O fair and false! O master! master!
master!

[Enter OSWALD.]

Osw. Your Majesty, how goes the festival?
What! nothing touched upon the table? Ah!
Who is the lady?

Fro. (stabbing him). Go and ask my master!
O filthy priest, this was thy handiwork
From first to last.

Osw. My liege, I'm hurt to death.
See that yon humpbacked pack o' villany
Doth suffer for this deed. Promise!

Ed. Not I.
He shall in naught be punished. As for thee,
Thy punishment, false priest, is in the hands
Of that High King whom thou hast always
served
With more of treachery ev'n than thou'st served
me,
Thy mortal monarch.

(To FROTHI.) Call thy lady's women ;
She hath but swooned, I think. O Athelwold!
Would God that I lay there instead of thee!

THE END

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